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# Old Tales, New Renditions: The Foundations And Development Of Anti-Semitic Ritual Murder Libels With Emphasis On A Shift In Centrality From Crucifixion To Blood Motifs In Late Medieval And Early Modern German Contexts

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OLD TALES, NEW RENDITIONS: THE FOUNDATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ANTI-  
SEMITIC RITUAL MURDER LIBELS WITH EMPHASIS ON A SHIFT IN CENTRALITY  
FROM CRUCIFIXION TO BLOOD MOTIFS IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN  
GERMAN CONTEXTS

by

Evan John Halbach  
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2013  
Master of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2016

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

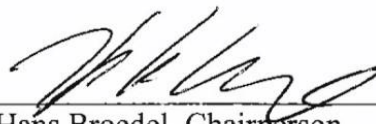
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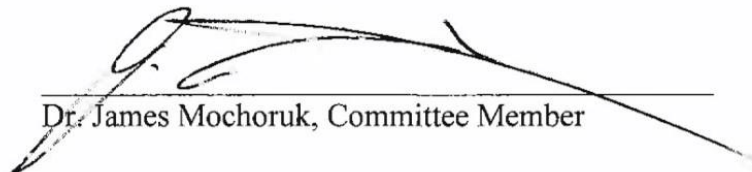
Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

December  
2016


This thesis, submitted by Evan J. Halbach in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.


  
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Title            Old Tales, New Renditions: The Foundations and Development of Anti-Semitic Ritual Murder Libels with Emphasis on a Shift in Centrality from Crucifixion to Blood Motifs in Late Medieval and Early Modern German Contexts

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## ABSTRACT

The terms “ritual murder libel” and “blood libel” both refer primarily to medieval and early modern anti-Semitic allegations that Jews murdered Christian children on religious holidays, either to abuse or profane Christ and Christians, or to acquire Christian blood for use in Jewish ritual, sorcery, or as a medicine to treat stereotypical racial infirmities. Scholars to this point have generally treated the two libels as either synonymous, or have considered distinctions to be relatively insignificant. Insufficient treatment has been given to an inversion of primary and secondary motivations attributed to the libels’ constructed villains. In “ritual murder libels,” contempt for Christians and a desire to inflict harm on them is the alleged primary motivation for their murder at the hands of Jews, and while the acquisition of human blood stands present, it is of secondary emphasis. In contrast, “blood libel” places the acquisition of blood as primary while in some cases excludes the other motivation entirely. By examining a broad range of libel material, both “popular” and intellectual, spanning the late-twelfth through the mid-sixteenth centuries, in reference to their contexts of formulation, this study endeavors to demonstrate that while the libels did share the same symbolic motifs, the ritual murder libel evolved, and ultimately experienced a shift in late medieval Germany into what can properly be called “blood libel.” By acknowledging the distinction between the libels, one is able to contextualize and better understand both the function and form of these contemptible accusation.

## INTRODUCTION

Wherever anti-Semitism has flourished, supporting stereotypes and tropes have likewise flourished. The charge of ritual murder of Christian children on Jewish holidays is no exception. The charge involved the belief that Jews on a regular or semi-regular basis abducted and killed Christian children, especially during religious festivals, according to the mandates of their religion. Two primary motivations supported the trope. The first was that the Jews crucified these children in order to mock Christ or commemorate his crucifixion at the hands of their ancestors. The second which forms the basis of the blood libel, a term generally used synonymously with “ritual murder,” is that Jews required blood for religious, magical, and later “medical” use. Generally speaking, accusations of and stories about Jewish ritual murder featured both mock crucifixions as well as abuse of the child and the draining of his or her blood. But although “ritual murder libel” and “blood libel” are often used synonymously, there is cause to treat the pair of terms as more than an accidental redundancy. From the first appearance of the charge in the twelfth century into the fourteen century, the primary motivation of Jews in the libel was to abuse and profane Christianity and as such, most early cases featured Christian children put to death on wooden crosses or posts. Blood certainly was not absent from these early cases but while the libels could lack the collection of blood, its crucifixion motifs were indispensable from the start. But when ritual murder charges surfaced in southern Germanic Europe and northern Italy at the close of the fifteenth century, primary emphasis was inverted and it was suggested that Jews kidnapped and killed Christian children not in order to abuse them



(although they were still featured as doing so) but to drain their blood. Extant blood libel narratives from the late medieval and early modern periods feature Jews meticulously, even surgically draining blood while earlier crucifixion motifs are minimized or absent. But as crucifixion motifs did not disappear entirely, it takes focused attention to subtle changes over time to notice this significant shift in emphasis. In the following chapters it will be demonstrated that the blood libel is a distinct charge that evolved out of but came to stand independent from the ritual murder libel.

In pursuit of this understanding, Chapter 1 explores the preconditions and developments that made the eventual appearance of the ritual murder charge possible and influenced its early form. To accomplish this, the chapter first explores how generally peaceful relations between Jews and Christians from the fourth century A.D. regressively devolved as Jews were culturally and legally separated from their Christian neighbors. This separation, it will be shown, was a precondition for the creation of a Jewish scapegoat and the development of the fears that were necessary for the growth in anti-Semitic libels in the High Middle Ages. These fears were mixed with the religious anxieties of the age to create a likewise religiously-oriented accusation utilizing crucifixion symbolism. Chapter 2 explores the development of Christian conceptions of Jews as physically threatening to the eucharistic Body and Blood and as figures associated with child harm. These foundational associations were fundamental to the development and spread of seminal ritual murder constructions as well as related host desecration libels that held that Jews stole or bought the Host in order to abuse it (i.e. Christ) through stabbing or burning. The chapter highlights these developments by examining a late thirteenth century German version of the Marian devotional story of “The Jewish Boy,” the earliest version of which dates from the sixth century AD. The story tells of a Jewish boy who witnesses the transformation of the Eucharistic

Host into a vision of the Christ Child and comes to a strong faith in Christ but is punished by being thrown into an oven by his father when he learns of his son's conversion. The child, however is miraculously protected from the flames by the Virgin Mary. By drawing parallels between the story and its factual contemporary context, it will be shown how, working off the prejudices of prior centuries, symbolic associations were formed between Jews, child abuse, and the Eucharist; the literal body and blood of Christ. These symbolic associations cross-pollinated across the Christian narrative tradition and provided the constituent anti-Semitic motifs used in the libels of the following centuries. Working from the foundation set by Chapter 2, Chapter 3 shows how in late medieval and early modern southern Germany a greater emphasis on blood in eucharistic, mystical, and medical spheres brought the evolution of the ritual murder libel to its final form as it came to stand distinct and prominent from the charge for a time, ultimately to diminish in plausibility in the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Before delving into this present contribution to ritual murder and blood libel scholarship, a general outline of the libels' development and the present state of its historiography is merited. Current scholarly consensus suggests that the first ritual murder charge was leveled in the English town of Norwich in 1144 when local Jews were accused of murdering and crucifying a young boy in contempt of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Early accusations followed this basic theme as the charges travelled to the continent, through France, Spain, and Germany, and surfaced intermittently in Western Europe at times when Christian antipathy against Jews was at high tide. The charges

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<sup>1</sup> R. Po-Chia Hsia has pointed out that "In the middle decades of the sixteenth century, the conjunction of new discourses in theology and law challenged the ideological foundations of ritual murder discourse" and that during this same period, German Jews were able to secure stronger legal protections. The result was a decrease in ritual murder trials and their being taken seriously by learned elites while popular belief in the libels persisted, especially in rural areas. R. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 227-230.

<sup>2</sup> For the most recent study of the case of the 1144 case of William of Norwich, see E. M. Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*, 1 edition (Oxford University Press, 2015).

were non-linear and at times inconsistent. The charge in Norwich, in fact, was not the first ever charge of Jewish ritual murder but only the first in a new chain of transmission that set the basic archetype until the early modern period. The first account of Jewish ritual murder that makes an appearance in the historical record is in Flavius Josephus's *Against Apion*. It tells of the discovery in 168 B.C.E. of a ritual murder plot allegedly uncovered when Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrated the Jewish Temple and a captive Greek was discovered inside. This Greek, it says, claimed that the Jews had captured him in order to be fattened (and possibly eaten?) in contempt of the Greeks. The propagandistic motive of the story seems rather obvious in our time as it seems to have been for Josephus who refuted it in *Against Apion*. Ironically, by doing so, however, Gavin Langmuir has argued, he "thereby ensured its preservation."<sup>3</sup> Langmuir convincingly argued, however, that *Against Apion* was rarely copied in the Middle Ages, and the sections pertaining to the ritual murder narrative were virtually always omitted.<sup>4</sup> It appears to have had little to do with the charge as it developed from the twelfth century.

The second case that comes to us from antiquity was recounted by the 5<sup>th</sup> century Christian historian Socrates (of Constantinople). He tells that Jews in Inmestar (modern Syria) in 415 AD had been banned from burning an effigy during Purim of the biblical figure Haman who they were accused of making to "resemble Christ." According to the story, the Jews followed this ban by substituting a Christian child on the cross. Langmuir concedes that "Given the bitterness of relations then, the incident *might*<sup>5</sup> have occurred, but it could equally have been imagined by Socrates or others."<sup>6</sup> Based on the availability of this source and its lack of usage by most "Latin

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<sup>3</sup> Gavin Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth," in Alan Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, 1 edition (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 8-9. Reprinted from *Speculum* 59 (1984): 820-846.

<sup>4</sup> Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth," in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*, 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup> Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth," in *Ibid*, 10.

Christian authors up to 1096,” Langmuir finds it unlikely that it influenced the later historiography stemming from accusations in England following 1150.<sup>7</sup> But whether this specific incident exerted influence or similar accusations developed independently, medieval Christians in various places did come to see Purim as a celebration which featured a mock crucifixion. In turn, it was a popular date for ritual murder accusations.

To what extent medieval manifestations of ritual murder accusations were linked to ancient ones is up for debate but the consensus is that the root of the resurgence of such charges took hold in Norwich following the murder of a Christian boy named William during Easter week, 1144. The case was originally left unsolved and whatever shock or upheaval it had initially generated quickly dissipated. That is until the monk Thomas of Monmouth showed up around four years later and set about creating a shrine and recreating the fateful day of William’s murder in his *Life of William of Norwich*. The earliest and most basic story was that the child, an apprentice skinner, had been told by his uncle and grandfather to stop frequenting the houses of Jews in his trade. According to William’s mother, a man claiming to be the archdeacon’s cook who she presumed was a Christian, offered William a job in a kitchen and took him away. His body was found on Easter Saturday by a nun and peasant near Thorpe Wood.<sup>8</sup> Thomas’s account tells of a synod that was held in April where Godwin, a priest and William’s uncle accused the Jews of the crime. The evidence according to Thomas was “‘firstly from what by custom the Jews have been obliged to do on these days” as well as “the manner of the pains inflicted and the type of wounds”<sup>9</sup> The Jews, in this instance, were not charged. The importance of this account is that it introduced two key features standard to ritual murder cases in the following century: the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, trans. Miri Rubin (London: Penguin Classics, 2015), 32.

idea that Jews were required to practice human sacrifice during their holidays and that they crucified their victims. The former feature was especially bolstered by Thomas's most famous source, a recent Christian convert named Theobald. Thomas says on the authority of Theobald that "it was decided by [the Jews] a long time ago that every year, to the shame and affront of Christ, a Christian somewhere on earth be sacrificed to the highest God, [so that they can] take revenge for the injuries of Him, whose death is the reason for their exclusion from their fatherland and their exile as slaves in foreign lands."<sup>10</sup>

With the initial elements of the ritual murder narrative in place, the blood libel accusation continued to coalesce with the addition of the trope that Jews required Christian bodies for magical purposes. This addition is present in the contemporary account relayed by Matthew Paris of the alleged murder of the child Hugh of Lincoln in 1255. The child had been discovered dead in a cesspool near a Jewish home. The fiscal motivations for the accusations and proceedings have been critiqued by others but what concerns us here is the development of the specifics of the accusatory narrative.<sup>11</sup> The accusation, like its precursor from Norwich, features both the alleged kidnapping of the child and his crucifixion at the hands of the Jews who seek to mock Christ. The alleged Jewish use of blood for magical purposes also made an early showing at this juncture, but descriptions of Hugh's crucifixion received primary emphasis, and great effort was made to link this child crucifixion with that of Christ by drawing on imagery from the gospels.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 63-64.

<sup>11</sup> According to Joseph Jacobs, "Henry III hated the Jews, while making use of them as sponges to replete his treasury..." Joseph Jacobs, "Little St. Hugh of Lincoln: Researches in History, Archaeology, and Legend," in Alan Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, 1 edition (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 65. Reprinted from Joseph Jacobs, *Jewish Ideals and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 192-224.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Paris, *Matthew Paris's English History, From the Year 1235 to 1273 (Historia Major)*, trans. J.A. Giles, vol. 3 (London: George Bell & Sons, 1889), 138-139.

The proliferation and influence of these motifs was ensured by both Matthew's text as well as two other contemporary chronicles: the so called *Burton annals* and the *Waverley annals*. Each relayed slightly different versions of the story but the version found in Paris's *Chronica majora*, "probably the version known to Chaucer, Marlowe, Percy, and Lamb" has been more influential.<sup>13</sup> As Langmuir pointed out, (following the findings of folklorist Francis Child) a second tradition evolved from Hugh's 1255 death in addition to Paris's known as the "Ballad of Sir Hugh" or "The Jew's Daughter." As the story goes, a Jewish girl lures a boy [Hugh] inside of her home and kills him, but this version has little in common with the original charges of Jewish ritual murder made in Lincoln.<sup>14</sup> As Joseph Jacobs pointed out, however, the version that spread to France shortly after 1255 had much in common with Matthew Paris's version including the sequence of events, motivations, and crucifixion motifs.<sup>15</sup> This version, no doubt, exerted influence on the libel as it developed and spread throughout the continent.

The themes of yearly Jewish human sacrifices, especially during holidays persisted and spread across Europe. The crucifixion trope initially remained prominent, but came to be progressively accompanied by motives of magic and an emphasis on blood. The accusations had spread quickly. Following Norwich, they spread to France in 1171 and to Germany by 1199. On the continent, they found new life primarily in German regions while at the same time, charges in England became infrequent and ceased altogether after 1255.<sup>16</sup> In Germany, a few ritual murder cases popped up in the first half of the thirteenth century but it was not until the end of the century that accusations spread like wildfire.

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<sup>13</sup> Gavin I. Langmuir, "The Knight's Tale of Young Hugh of Lincoln," *Speculum* 47, no. 3 (1972): 464.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 460.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Jacobs, "Little St. Hugh of Lincoln: Researches in History, Archaeology, and Legend," in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*, 61. Reprinted from Joseph Jacobs, *Jewish Ideals and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 192-224.

<sup>16</sup> Colin Holmes, "The Ritual Murder Accusation in Britain," in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*, 102.

This wave of anti-Semitic charges saw approximately one accusation of ritual murder per decade from the 1280s through the 1330s paired with the appearance of the host desecration libel at Konstanz in 1326 and another in Deggendorf in 1336. The ritual murder libel in which Jews were alleged to capture and kill Christian children either to insult and abuse Christians/Christianity *and/or* to acquire Christian blood, was analogous in many ways to the host desecration libel which held that Jews stole or otherwise gained possession of the Host in order to abuse it and by proxy, Christ. Fundamental to the latter libel was the trope that from the “wounds” of abuse, the Host would bleed in witness to the truth of transubstantiation. As chapters 2 and 3 will make evident, the ritual murder and host desecration libels worked from the same symbolic pool consisting of eucharistic imagery and stereotypes concerning Jewish ritual abuse. The appearance of host desecration charges contemporaneously with those of ritual murder alone should serve as a preliminary signpost for the possibility that an emphasis on blood was becoming increasingly potent in the archetype.

Accompanying a growing emphasis on blood in German Christianity generally in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, blood became the key emphasis of ritual murder accusations, making the blood libel the go-to anti-Judaic accusation in German-speaking areas. And by the mid to late fifteenth century blood was featured in German ritual murder libels in equal measure as crucifixion motifs. Trials and expulsions following this archetype surfaced in Endigen (1470), Regensburg (1470-76), nearby Trent (1475), Waldkirch/Freiburg (1504) and elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> Increased emphasis on blood in this “cultural” sphere was paired with a fixation on blood in

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<sup>17</sup> Ronnie Hsia offers the most accessible entry into the wave of successive charges in this period in *The Myth of Ritual Murder*. For Endigen see pp. 17-31, Trent pp. 43-50, Regensburg pp. 66-85, Waldkirch/Freiburg pp. 86-110.

German religious expression, as Christian shrines to miraculous blood surfaced.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the medical practice of the day focused very intently on blood.<sup>19</sup> Chapter 3 will explore these trends directly.

The late medieval accusations themselves support the idea that the ritual murder libel and suggestions that Jews lusted for Christian blood were taken seriously but, what's more, popular expressions such as plays demonstrate that belief in the narrative was not limited to the learned.<sup>20</sup> Fifteenth century plays, popular woodcuts, and vernacular translations of chronicles like Schendel's famous *Weltchronik*, helped to solidify a belief in the blood libel's factuality, both reinforcing and updating old archetypes. A consistent representation of the blood libel was the story of Simon of Trent, yet another child who had gone missing and was the axis of accusations that Jews murdered children for the use of their blood. This case was not only cited in Schendel's work which sought to provide a religious account of all of human history up to its composition in 1493 but also featured in the formal polemics of notable theologians.<sup>21</sup> Noted counter-reformer Johann Eck (1486-1543) wrote his *Refutation of a Jewish Booklet* which R. Hsia has called "the most massive and systematic formulation of the blood libel..."<sup>22</sup> It accuses Jews of being magicians and of poisoning Christians, and explains the specific uses for which they require Christian blood, mostly as a cure for supposed maladies from which Jews were said to suffer.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum has termed this fixation "blood piety" and dedicated a monograph to a consideration of the trend. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> For further information on blood and medieval medicine, including rich considerations of German source material, see Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Karl von Amira, *Das Endinger Judenspiel* (Halle, M. Niemeyer, 1883), <http://archive.org/details/dasendingerjude00amirgoog>.

<sup>21</sup> Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 46-47.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 127.



Eck was responding to another theologian, Andreas Osiander's earlier refutation of such claims which to my knowledge is one of the few scholarly refutations of the libel during the period.<sup>24</sup>

Belief in the blood libel likely remained persistent but official documentation and learned focus on it seems to have waned after the flurry of accusations in late fifteenth and early sixteenth century Germany. The resurgence of blood libel discourse came in the late nineteenth century. At that time, accusations resumed in some parts of Eastern Europe, but these new accusations were met by a more skeptical intelligentsia who found the existence of a centuries-old practice of Jewish ritual murder fanciful, yet remained open to the idea that the practice had (or did) happen in isolated incidents. Blood libel charges popped up in Alexandria in 1881, Hungary in 1882, and Russia in 1911. British papers especially took to printing the old claim that both refuted and perpetually legitimized the accusations: that Jews as a *people* did not take part in such practices, but that it was likely that certain *isolated sects* of Jews did. A popular British book, Richard Burton's *The Jew, The Gypsy and El Islam* (1898) claimed a basis for ritual murder in Jewish religion. Accusations also gained momentum when in 1934 the Nazi propagandist Julius Streicher relayed them as fact in the tabloid publication *Der Stürmer*.<sup>25</sup> The charge's staying power in the English-speaking world was also troubling. It additionally popped up "without refutation" in a 1926 book, *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology*. The book, written by Montague Summers, unfortunately remains available in reprint to spread belief in the libel to receptive readers to this day.<sup>26</sup> Norman Cohn has dismissed the work and characterized Summers as a "religious fanatic."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Andreas Osiander, *Andreas Osianders Schrift über die Blutbeschuldigung* (Kiel: Fiencke, 1893).

<sup>25</sup> Colin Holmes, "The Ritual Murder Accusation in Britain," in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*, 104-107.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 114. For Summers's view on the libel, ill-received by scholars, see Montague Summers, *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology*. (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973), 195-196.

<sup>27</sup> Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 120.

## Modern Historiography of the Blood Libel

The pervasiveness of the libel has made it a focus of much scholarship which has approached it in differing ways. The early historiography focused on defending Judaism from arguments that human sacrifice. Still, perhaps the most comprehensive refutation of the libel is Hermann Strack's *The Jew and Human Sacrifice*, published in Germany in 1909 and translated several years later into English by Henry Blanchamp.<sup>28</sup> This was followed by *The Ritual Murder Libel and the Jew: The Report by Cardinal Lorenzo Ganganelli* in 1935.<sup>29</sup> A unifying factor in these two early 20<sup>th</sup> century refutations was the focus on the incompatibility of Jewish religious beliefs with the shedding of blood, and in Strack's case, the inconsistency of trial documents. Strack as a professional Hebraist was also especially apt to point out religious inconsistencies. But Strack was not without his critics. The inverse was argued by August Rohling, whom Hannah Johnson describes as "a curious hybrid of scholarly ambition and intellectual mediocrity." Rohling published *The Talmud Jew* in the 1870s, a pamphlet which was a prolific seller in its time but has since been thoroughly discredited.<sup>30</sup>

A second school of enquiry sought to reconstruct the actual events that led to accusations against Jews in order to discover the real causes of death and the actual guilty parties. This attempt is exemplified by the work of Joseph Jacobs at the turn of the twentieth century which sought to recreate the events leading to the death of the boy Hugh of Lincoln. Using marriage documentation, he ultimately argued that the child accidentally fell into a cesspool located near a

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<sup>28</sup> Hermann Leberecht Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice: Human Blood and Jewish Ritual, an Historical and Sociological Inquiry*, trans. Henry Blanchamp (London: Cope & Fenwick, 1909).

<sup>29</sup> Pope Clement XIV and Cecil Roth editor, *The Ritual Murder Libel and the Jew: The Report by Cardinal Lorenzo Ganganelli (Pope Clement XIV)*, (London: Woburn Press, 1934).

<sup>30</sup> Hannah Johnson, *Blood Libel: The Ritual Murder Accusation at the Limit of Jewish History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 53.

Jewish residence where a large gathering of Jews took place. He argues that the boy accidentally died in their cesspool, and cognizant of the trope as it already existed, the Jews sought to cover his death up by throwing his body in a well elsewhere. While intriguing and masterfully constructed, his argument is circumstantial and more than a few hundred years too late.<sup>31</sup>

Another approach to the blood libel has been to abandon attempts to reconstruct the actual murders using problematic sources but to understand the process of the narrative's creation and transmission. Gavin Langmuir pointed out the futility of reconstruction attempts, arguing in his 1990 book *Religion, History, and Antisemitism* and elsewhere that as because all remaining sources are biased and additionally plagued by indeterminism even in their own time, in all likelihood we will simply never know what happened. Langmuir wanted to focus instead on what we can know: that is to say, where the *accusations* and resulting archetypes came from. For example, in regard to the case of William of Norwich and its role in shaping libels to come, Langmuir gives full credit for the creation of the charges to Thomas of Monmouth, William of Norwich's hagiographer, stating that "[Thomas] created a myth that affected Western mentality from the twelfth to the twentieth century and caused, directly or indirectly, far more deaths than William's murderer could ever have dreamt of committing."<sup>32</sup>

Taking a very different approach, Hannah Johnson has criticized a focus strictly on the development of tropes and takes issue with Langmuir on several matters. First, she takes issue with his attempt to make event reconstruction taboo. More fervently, she has argued against his categorization of thought into strictly rational or irrational categories based on modern understandings of the two. She points out how Langmuir's criticism of Thomas and his

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<sup>31</sup> Joseph Jacobs, "Little St. Hugh of Lincoln: Researches in History, Archaeology, and Legend," in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*. Reprinted from Joseph Jacobs, *Jewish Ideals and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 192-224.

<sup>32</sup>Gavin I. Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth," in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*, 34.

admonishment of his contemporaries for not immediately finding fault in the Jews is akin to Langmuir's own modern conception that the rational conclusion a modern thinker reaches when examining the libels is that such events never happened. Johnson sees this as a latent double standard.<sup>33</sup> Her criticisms are valid, especially when one takes into account the social gulf between Christians and Jews in medieval and early modern contexts.<sup>34</sup> That is to say, from a certain point of view, a conclusion is only "irrational" when it contradicts the information available. For Christians who by virtue of their context were largely ignorant of actual Jewish religious belief, the practice of smearing blood on doorposts during Pesach, for example, would reinforce constructions of Judaism as a strange blood-based religion. Langmuir's characterization of Christians in the period as irrational would however stand up better, one might suppose, when applied to contexts in which learned Christians believed in the validity of the libel despite already possessing a certain basic understanding of Judaism and its prohibitions on the consumption of blood.

Despite Langmuir's influence and cautioning against what one could call "crime scene reconstructions," several valuable "microhistories" have examined individual cases in detail, typically those most famous. Such studies generally have placed the impetus for accusations on economic motives or the introduction of anti-Semitic preaching. Noteworthy is E.M. Rose's recent study of the case of William of Norwich. Diverging from Langmuir who identified Thomas of Monmouth's personal mission to popularize William as the driving impetus behind

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<sup>33</sup> Johnson, *Blood Libel*, 40-41.

<sup>34</sup> The social divide between Jewish and Christian communities was not total, but it was formidable. Both groups employed different languages in written communication, including their religious texts. Moreover, Christianity and the New Testament was the well from which the dominant culture drew to create art and literature which left Jews partially alienated from these spheres of activity/influence. Additionally, as Robert Chazan puts it "In this environment, there was no neutral source of authority on which Jews could depend" and therefore, Jews moved to create functional communities self-segregated from day to day Christian life. See chapter 5 Robert Chazan, "Jewish Life in Western Christendom," in Judith Reesa Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 113-137.

the growth in his devotional cult, Rose credits renewed interest in the murder to the use of William's death as evidence in an 1150 trial in the same community. The trial concerned the murder of a Jewish moneylender by an indebted Christian knight whose defense centered on a renewed accusation that the Jewish community of Norwich had martyred the boy several years prior and the defendant was therefore justified in killing the Jew. Rose marks as significant the shift from libel against individual Jews to entire Jewish communities. She also examined the localized religious, social, and economic context of the first ritual murder charge in France, attributing much of the spread of blood libel to the individual motivations and royal policies of Philip II.<sup>35</sup> Such studies are immensely valuable in their own right, but also contribute to a scholarly understanding of the ritual murder libel when set in context, compared, and contrasted with other historical accusations against the Jews.

A single controversial work seeks the roots of the blood libel far before the Norwich case. Israel Yuval, in a 1994 article for the Hebrew language journal *Zion*, forwarded the thesis that the Christian belief in blood libel was fostered by real Jewish martyrological theology.<sup>36</sup> The article received expanded treatment in a 2000 monograph in Hebrew first published in English in 2006. Central to Yuval's argument is the idea that after the destruction of the Temple in 70AD, Judaism became markedly receptive/reactive to the influence of Christianity. This was an inversion of scholarly trends at the time that highlighted Judaism's stability and enduring authenticity in spite of disparate contexts. Yuval's tentative but persistent assumption is that in

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<sup>35</sup> "Philip took an active role in spreading [the libel] and used it as the centerpiece for his long-term strategy of building up Paris and cementing and centralizing royal power." Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich*, 210.

<sup>36</sup> Yuval's thesis originally appeared in Israel Yuval, "Vengeance and Damnation, Blood and Defamation: From Jewish Martyrdom to Blood Libel Accusations," *Zion* 58 (1993): 33-90. An entire fascicle in *Zion* 59 (1994) was dedicated to its reception and critique. Most of this reception was negative apart from מרי מינטי and Mary Minty, "Kiddush Ha-Shem in German Christian Eyes in the Middle Ages / בגרמניה נוצרים בעיני השם קידוש," *Zion* / *הביניים בימי בגרמניה נוצרים בעיני השם קידוש*, no. 67 (1994): 209-66. The article concluded that German Christians perceived Jewish martyrdom not as a phenomenon practiced by individuals but a collective part of the Jewish religion. This shift from individual to communal guilt is similar to the shift explored in E.M. Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich*, 90.

cases where Jewish theology or behavior mirrors that of Christians, Christian influence on medieval Jewish belief should be presumed “unless it may be proved that Jewish sources are more ancient.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, rather than assuming Judaism’s conservatism and emphasizing its resistance to change unless Christian influence is clearly demonstrated, Yuval treats the influence of the dominant Christian religion on Judaism as a given due to Christianity’s cultural and political hegemony and therefore inevitable influence. Jewish martyrological theology from this vantage is a response Christianity’s focus on Christian redemption through Christ’s suffering wherein Jewish martyrs substitute for Christ and ensure Jewish redemption. This attribution of influence was heavily critiqued due to the speculative nature of the assumptions upon which it necessarily depends.<sup>38</sup> However, Yuval’s general argument that Jewish martyrological theology and resulting behavior, regardless of its source fed into constructions of Jews as murderers seems to have held up better.<sup>39</sup> His primary evidence is located in the Jewish martyrdom chronicles of 1096 in which, in order to avoid the apostasy of forced conversion by Crusaders, certain German Ashkenazi Jews murdered their own children. This image of the murdering Jews, Yuval contends, was transposed and distorted into the idea of the Jewish ritual murder of Christian children.

Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia in his book *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, provided what is still perhaps the most comprehensive contemporary treatment of the libel to date. Like Langmuir, he traces

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<sup>37</sup> Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2008), 21-22.

<sup>38</sup> Susan Einbinder has criticized Yuval’s propensity to see Jewish/Christian relations as static over varying temporal, geographical, and cultural contexts. See Susan L. Einbinder, “Review of *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, by Israel Jacob Yuval,” *Speculum* 82, no. 3 (2007): 780–81.

<sup>39</sup> David Biale has since expanded upon Yuval’s basic line of inquiry into the influence of Jewish and Christian theologies on each other but with greater emphasis on the cross-fertilization of ideas rather than an omnidirectional chain of transmission. See David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Chapter three of the present work will explore this in more detail.

the spread of the trope but spends far more time reconstructing the social, financial, and political contexts of each individual case to discover underlying motivations. His analyses however focus much more intensively on the individual circumstances of each trial and the often economic motivations behind the accusations. His work gives extensive treatment to the role of pamphlets and chronicles in spreading the trope as background for these individual contexts, ultimately showing how established tropes served ulterior ends.<sup>40</sup>

It is worth noting that even in recent times a monograph suggesting the historical factuality of the blood libel found a willing publisher. In 2007 Elio Toaff published *Pasque di sangue* (Bloody Passovers) in Italian.<sup>41</sup> The work, which utilized trial records from the famous ritual murder case of Simon of Trent argues, as Johnson puts it “that we can discern some realities of popular Jewish ritual practices from this problematic testimony, and [appears to suggest] (notably in his first edition) that such practices could have included actual murders.”<sup>42</sup> The work has received overwhelmingly negative critical reception by the press and historians, if acknowledged at all, as it takes testimony garnered under torture at near face value.<sup>43</sup> Amateurish or not, the work is worthy of note in that it demonstrates the pernicious nature of blood libel beliefs. Toaff echoes in the twenty-first century many arguments of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with his statements that Jews were innocent in *most* cases while accepting the existence of “fringe sects” in *some cases*. The twenty-first century, however, seems to have been harder on him than earlier historical epochs.

So where does the present work fit in the blood libel historiography? Its purpose is not to explain why antisemitism existed generally nor to unravel individual cases in order to

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<sup>40</sup> Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*.

<sup>41</sup> Ariel Toaff, *Pasque di sangue: ebrei d'Europa e omicidi rituali* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, *Blood Libel*, 132.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

demonstrate a tidy sequence of cause and effect. Antisemitism was a marked feature of the Middle Ages following the crusades, and the form it took was often a mere accessory to other motivations, be they economic, religious, or something else. Other scholars have worked hard to unravel motivations of this sort. Herein we seek, rather, to understand the *forms* the libels took and the role of myriad historical and cultural currents in shaping these forms. How was each trope fashioned in such a way as to find a place in Europe's collective cultural memory, and what made grotesquely negative representations of Jews and preposterous notions of human sacrifice plausible to the societies where these anti-Semitic libels manifested? To answer these questions completely for every setting in which the libels surfaced would take a host of scholarly monographs. Our present goal is more modest and of necessity must focus on key shifts and tolerate the occasional simplification. Painting so broadly has its drawbacks but will provide additional studies of the ritual murder and blood libel necessary context, and a framework with which to understand a phenomenon so insidious, so abhorrent, and unfortunately in some corners, so enduring



## CHAPTER I

### **Constructing Barriers between Christians and Jews: Christian Redefinition and the Development of Anti-Semitic Suspicion**

The story of the relationship between Jewish and Christian communities is not a simple tale to tell. It is neither a tale of paternal Christian mercy toward the misguided deniers of Christ nor is it a narrative about the eternal persecution of a faultless people in all places and contexts. To recognize this is not to deny the precarious position in which Jews often found themselves on the historical stage but rather to deliver them from the realm of caricature and restore them to the position of historical actors. In the context of medieval Europe, Jews could often be found as trusted advisors to Christian princes or reviled objects of community suspicion. Often, they were both. It is perhaps axiomatic that in times of persecution, conflict not only occurred between Christians and Jews, but frequently between the local Christian community and high secular and ecclesiastic authorities working to assuage the tempestuous masses. In the relatively religiously and ethnically homogenous context of medieval Europe, suspicion toward the Jewish ‘other,’ always simmering, was apt to boil over uncontrollably during times of social instability. It is relatively easy, for example, to see how preaching the Crusades in the Rhineland in 1096, against heretics at home and infidels abroad translated into attacks on Jews, the only accessible complete nonbelievers in arm’s reach.<sup>44</sup> It is harder, however, to identify the source of more outlandish persecutions based on charges of Jewish ritual murder. These charges held that Jews either

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<sup>44</sup> For more on the massacres of 1096 see Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, “Effects of Religious Animosity on the Jews” in H.H. Ben-Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 413-420.

murdered Christian children for nefarious ends or sought to physically abuse the Eucharistic Host. The historian is left with the difficult, though not impossible task of explaining why these charges asserted themselves with vigor in northern Europe in the thirteenth century. The explanation is not as elusive as it might initially appear. The charges were likely due at least in part to the need of the dominant Christian society to ease their own religious and social anxieties, and for that reason, Jews became a target of attack. To become a suitable target on which to unload the anxieties of the Christian community, however, Jews had to first find themselves in a class that existed outside of that community. To see how this social distancing came to pass, one must set their gaze prior to the middle ages. By looking at conflicts between Jews and Christians in both ancient and medieval contexts, it becomes clear that social distancing of Jews was a precursor of the creation of a Jewish scapegoat at the heart of medieval anti-Semitic libels.

Outbursts of persecution like the Rhineland massacres or later charges of ritual murder are far less idiosyncratic than they might initially appear. Though not apparent at first glance, the same social function, that is, the function of the scapegoat, was working both broadly in the cases of widespread Jewish persecution that accompanied the crusades but also, during localized libels as well. René Girard outlined what he called the “scapegoat mechanism.” He argued that “persecutions...generally take place in times of crisis, which weaken normal institutions and favor *mob* formation.”<sup>45</sup> His focus was upon periods of dramatic societal chaos as occur in times of historical crises, such as an outbreak of plague, for example. These times of turbulence, he argued, cause “Institutional collapse [which] obliterates or telescopes hierarchical and functional differences, so that everything has the same monotonous and monstrous aspect.”<sup>46</sup> To reconstitute a semblance of natural order, the society creates unity in opposition to a scapegoat

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<sup>45</sup> René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

accused of “a particular category of crimes.”<sup>47</sup> These crimes are archetypal. “They always include ritual infanticide, religious profanation, incestuous relationships, and bestiality.”<sup>48</sup>

Girard primarily applied his scapegoat mechanism to times of external crises. That is to say, when outside physical events (e.g. a plagues, invasions) strike and create chaos in the material world a society perceiving itself as under threat creates a scapegoat (generally unintentionally) to renew a sense of order. Such crises, however, only become the stimulus for persecutions as members of a society are psychologically faced with a change in the normal order. Girard’s template, while valuable in identifying the persecution of scapegoats as a functional mechanism, can and should be taken one step further and expanded to apply to a greater range of events. It stands to reason that the seminal perceptions of disorder at the core of outbreaks of persecution need not be bound to an obvious *external* threat but can also be the result of more subtle challenges to the religious, political, or social status quo.

While the rise and rapid spread of the charge of Jewish ritual murder and its resulting persecutions throughout the thirteenth century are not easy to explain, Girard’s model, if expanded to allow for anxieties with more subtle causes, illuminates the phenomenon. The century, after all, bore witness to unprecedented change to the religious, intellectual, and political landscape of Europe. One such change was the official assertion of the Doctrine of Transubstantiation by the Church in 1215, holding that the bread and wine of communion transformed into the literal body and blood of Christ upon consecration. These changes not only were a contributing stimulus to the charges but in addition, the religious nature of their root anxieties resulted in their taking a religious *form*. Although the turbulent religious and political changes of the thirteenth century set the stage for persecutions, it was the particular construction

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 17.

of Jews as threats to Christian belief that positioned them to fulfill the role of scapegoat in a fashion particularly well-suited to the anxieties of the age.<sup>49</sup> The present work seeks to show how this scapegoat construction developed to set the foundation for the explosion of ritual murder and host desecration charges.

While our chosen framework details the *function* of the scapegoat in medieval Christian Europe with reference to a number of possible forms, the historian is still left to explain both why Jews in particular were chosen to serve the role of scapegoat in xenophobic narratives and additionally why they took the form of ritual murder or host desecration charges. Other “poorly integrated minorities” on different occasions certainly found themselves serving the role of scapegoat in medieval Europe, notably old and/or unmarried women accused of practicing witchcraft.<sup>50</sup> Unlike these women whose marginal statuses alone could serve as pretext for the development of suspicion and scorn however, Jews were “ready-made” outsiders. Their very unbelief in Christian doctrine and adherence to an incompatible religion, after all, made them near-heretics by definition and the most logical targets of violence rooted in anxieties over the validity of Christian doctrines like transubstantiation. The pages ahead will detail the historical concrescence of a multiplicity of stereotypes, that worked together to forge Jews into archetypal antagonists and threats to the Christian faith.

### **Religio-political Struggle, Societal Anxiety, and Early Ritual Murder**

The work of Gavin Langmuir lends support to the idea that anxieties over Christian belief could be at the root of persecutions. In his book *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, Langmuir

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<sup>49</sup> In the “mechanism of persecution,” ... “collective anguish and frustration [finds] vicarious appeasement in the victims who easily [find] themselves united in opposition to [the persecutor] by virtue of being poorly integrated minorities.” Ibid, 39.

<sup>50</sup> See subheading “Society and the nonconformist,” in Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England*, New edition (Penguin UK, 2003), 628-637.

identified three types of religious doubt: nonrational doubt, rational doubt, and rational empirical doubts. The latter were doubts “about beliefs that can arise when affirmations of faith are stated as empirical propositions and seem contradicted by empirical knowledge...”<sup>51</sup> He provides Christian doubt concerning transubstantiation as an example of the last type. It was growing doubt of Langmuir’s third type in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, he contended, that created a “new sensitivity to Jewish disbelief” not only over transubstantiation but generally. This sensitivity, in his view, was a driving impetus behind physical violence against Jews as happened in the Rhineland in 1096.<sup>52</sup>

The striking flux in and redefinition of institutional and religious norms during the thirteenth century caused a similar increase in “sensitivity.” Especially challenging to a sense of divine Christian world order were threats to the foundation of its leadership structure as happened when there were political struggles between the Papacy and Europe’s emperors and princes. The separation of secular and spiritual authority had long and often been likened to “two swords,” drawn from a metaphorical reading of Luke 22:38.<sup>53</sup> Rumblings of possible controversy were apparent in differing opinions of papal authority already being debated in commentaries on Gratian’s *Decretum* in the twelfth century. But in the early thirteenth century, Innocent III asserted his secular authority in various decretals and other letters. First, in *Venerabilem*, he

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<sup>51</sup> “The first is what I shall call nonrational doubts, for example, doubts about whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and Son or from the Father alone. The second...is the rational doubts that arise when theologians find logical contradictions in their formulations of beliefs, as Thomists and Ockhamists did in the Middle Ages. The third is rational empirical doubts...for example, doubt about the dogma that priestly consecration changes bread and wine into flesh and blood.” in Gavin I Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 102-103.

<sup>52</sup> Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 127-128.

<sup>53</sup> “‘For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was counted among the lawless’; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled.’ They said, ‘Lord look, here are two swords.’ He replied, ‘It is enough.’” (Luke 22:37-38). Zondervan, *NRSV Ministry/Pew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 858. See also, Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State: 1050-1300, with Selected Documents*, Second Revised ed. edition (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 122.

claimed the authority to pass verdict on disputed secular elections, but did not stop there. Innocent followed with a new claim. He argued that his authority descended from the Old Testament priest Melchisedech who had also been both a king and a spiritual leader. Therefore, Innocent suggested, he had hegemony over either sphere, whether he had decided to assert this authority or not.<sup>54</sup> In *Per Venerabilem* (not to be confused with the aforementioned *Venerabilem*) Innocent made this position stronger (if conveniently vague), declaring that “[The apostolic see] is accustomed to exercise the office of secular power sometimes and in some things **by itself**,<sup>55</sup> sometimes and in some things through others.”<sup>56</sup>

These declarations of authority probably would have created little political or societal tension if a powerful monarch had not also tried to increase his power twenty odd years later. In 1220, Frederick II, already possessing a claim to Sicily, was named Holy Roman Emperor and set out to expand his control over the whole of Italy. This potential threat to the Holy City was not taken lightly by the papacy and Frederick became an open enemy of both Gregory IX, who excommunicated him twice, and Innocent IV, who, after fleeing to the safety of Lyon, brought together a council to impose a sentence of deposition against Frederick.<sup>57</sup> In a letter addressed to the “kings of Christendom” in 1246, Frederick condemned the leaders of the Church, saying that many clerics were “drunk with the pleasures of the world” and “choked by the surfeit of riches and power.” More to the point, he called for all princes to seize control over the secular sphere in order to make the church modest again.<sup>58</sup> The Holy Roman Emperor and the Popes, then, both powers that traditionally ascribed their authority to God’s mandate, were open enemies by the

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<sup>54</sup> Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State*, 130.

<sup>55</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>56</sup> See the decretal *Per Venerabilem* (1202) (*Decretales* 4.17.13) in E. Friedberg, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, II (Leipzig, 1881), cols. 714-16. Reprinted in Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State*, 138-9.

<sup>57</sup> Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State*, 141.

<sup>58</sup> Frederick to the Kings of Christendom, 1246, ed. Huillard-Bréholles, *Historia Diplomatica Friderii Secundi*, VI, I (Paris, 1860), pp. 391-93 in *Ibid*, 146.

mid-thirteenth century after struggling over authority throughout the previous decades. While struggles between the “two swords” before this time had not been unknown, they had receded from the political arena for nearly two centuries since the Investiture crisis. Moreover, the vitriolic nature of Frederick’s polemics attacked the very spiritual integrity of Europe’s most powerful institution. Military campaigns aside, Christianity in Western Europe was now at risk of becoming a spiritual house divided.

While it would be unwise to argue direct or definitive causation, when one considers Girard’s model which associates the creation of a scapegoat with perceptions of compromised societal order paired with the dating of the appearance of anti-Semitic libels in the Holy Roman Empire, a compelling case can be made that there is more to the connection than accidental correlation. It is true that German Jews were accused of the murders of several Christians first in 1179 near Boppard where local Christians killed several of the accused, and again in the same town in 1195. Lacking precise details, it is uncertain if these were cases of ritual murder libel. It is also quite possible that the latter attack was motivated by the crusade declared by Henry IV the same year.<sup>59</sup> What is more certain is the fact that it was not until clear discord and instability grew in the religious/political order in thirteenth century Christian Europe that the libels gained a foothold in German-speaking lands. 1234, for example, marked the second excommunication of Frederick II by Gregory IX and it was only a mere one year later, in 1235, that accusations of ritual murder struck both Fulda and Wolfsheim.<sup>60</sup> Additional correlations appear that could suggest a link between the turbulent political climate created by the power struggles between Frederick and the Papacy and additional cases of anti-Semitic libel less than a decade later. 1243

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<sup>59</sup> Norman Roth, *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 296.

<sup>60</sup> Colin Holmes, “The Ritual Murder Accusation in Britain,” in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*, 102. Reprinted from *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4 (1981): 265-88.

marked the election of a new pope, Innocent IV, and the hopes of a papal/imperial reconciliation. These hopes, however, were dashed when Innocent IV confirmed the excommunication of Frederick declared by his predecessor.<sup>61</sup> Conflict between the secular and religious “swords” escalated with Frederick’s arrival at and siege of Viterbo near Rome where he met a decided defeat against troops loyal to the Papacy. Matthew Paris marked this defeat as seriously detrimental to Frederick’s reputation as well as public perception of his piety and faith in the foundation of his rule.<sup>62</sup> It is also in 1243 that the first anti-Semitic libels surfaced again in German cities with a host desecration charge leveled in Belitz, near Berlin and a ritual murder charge in Kitzingen.<sup>63</sup> Communication was slow during the period and no direct cause and effect relationship can or should be drawn, but these correlations lend some support, imperfect as it may be, to the idea that anxieties over institutional instability led to the creation of a Jewish scapegoat.

Not only did a thirteenth century restructuring of the political order contribute to a perception of institutional collapse fundamental to the creation of this scapegoat, but a restructuring of religious practice and interpretation was underway as well. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran council institutionalized the doctrine of transubstantiation. This doctrine holds that the bread and wine presented at communion is not merely metaphorical, but through the priest’s act of consecration transforms into the literal Body and Blood of Christ, even though to the human eye the sacramental species maintain all of the mundane physical attributes of bread and wine. This was

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<sup>61</sup> Matthew Paris, *Matthew Paris’s English History, From the Year 1235 to 1273 (Historia Major)*, trans. J.A. Giles, vol. 1 (London: George Bell & Sons, 1889): 465.

<sup>62</sup> “The city of Viterbo itself, besides certain towns and castles in the neighbourhood, had been lost, and the emperor himself had almost taken flight. His reputation was blasted, and it was whispered about...that he never properly observed the Catholic faith either in his words or opinions; that he was on improper terms of intimacy with Saracen women; that he invited Saracens, as well as other infidels, within his empire, and permitted them to build fortified cities.” Matthew Paris, *Historia Major*, 465.

<sup>63</sup> Mattis Kantor, *Codex Judaica Chronological Index of Jewish History*, 3rd Print edition (New York: Zichron Press Inc., 2007), 194.



not a new idea, but before Lateran IV, in many ecclesiastical jurisdictions, understanding of the precise nature of the eucharistic miracle was left at the personal discretion of individual believers. Following the ecumenical council, however, the literal interpretation was now mandate. There is no way to know for absolute certain how many Christians had trouble believing the newly codified doctrine, but the number must have been significant, as the council was called at least in part to counter the heresies of the Cathars, a group which denied the validity and literal nature of the Eucharist.<sup>64</sup> For those who remained in the Church but struggled with the idea that the Eucharist was literally Christ in the flesh, as what they saw plainly before them seemed to be nothing more than bread and wine, Langmuir's "rational empirical [religious] doubts" must have occurred. These doubts, one recalls, can act as the impetus for persecutions.

The weight of these doubts was heavy as the decision of Lateran IV was the culmination of centuries of contentious debate that reached a new level of intensity in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. As early as the ninth century, two contemporary French monks, Paschasius Radbertus and his former student Ratramnus argued over the precise nature of the Eucharist. Paschasius claimed that upon consecration, the host was transformed into the literal bleeding flesh of Christ.<sup>65</sup> This fact was only hidden from the recipient because according to Paschasius, "God knows that human nature cannot bear to eat raw flesh."<sup>66</sup> For Ratramnus, however, the Eucharist was spiritual food that "appeals to faith."<sup>67</sup> The view of Paschasius as articulated in his *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* in 831, ultimately held as orthodoxy until the eleventh century when a growing emphasis on empirical evidence ushered in by scholastic thought helped to birth

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<sup>64</sup> Jonathan Sumption, *The Albigensian Crusade* (London: Faber, 1999), 179-181.

<sup>65</sup> Enrico Mazza, *The Celebration of Eucharist: The Origin of the Rite and the Development of Its Interpretation*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minn: Pueblo Books, 1999), 183-184.

<sup>66</sup> Ratramnus quoted in Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (Collegeville Minn: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 79.

<sup>67</sup> Ratramnus quoted in *Ibid*, 82.

new waves of heterodoxy. For the purpose of the present study, it is perhaps relevant to note that a denial of the literal nature of the Eucharist was among the heretical claims made by those executed for heresy by King Robert the Pious of France in 1022, the first people to be burned as Christian heretics since 385.<sup>68</sup>

Another debate manifested in the eleventh century over essentially the same issue. Around mid-century, Theologian Berengarius of Tours put forward his view that there was no physical change in the Eucharist as “The body of Christ, having conquered death, is no longer subject to suffering and mortality...”<sup>69</sup> The Eucharist to him was the “real” body of Christ but this reality was created through a spiritual connection and not through a change in the substance of the bread itself. Unlike the debates of centuries prior, however, Berengarius was made to recant his views at the Roman Synod of [1059].<sup>70</sup> What is important here is that a more literal interpretation was put forward by Berengarius’s contemporary Lanfranc and that this interpretation ultimately won the day.<sup>71</sup> In the thirteenth century, the view of the Eucharist as *corpus verum* proffered ultimately in the works of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure became orthodoxy as opposed rather than the theretofore also acceptable conception of it as *figura corporis*.<sup>72</sup>

That this literal interpretation was officially affirmed in the early thirteenth century is no coincidence but part of a general trend of increased reverence for the material presence of Christ on earth. At this same time, cults of Eucharistic devotion were just starting to form. Following this increased devotion, the faithful would go to the place of Eucharistic reservation to adore and pray upon the Host.<sup>73</sup> With increased reverence, however, came increased anxiety over possible

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<sup>68</sup> Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 117.

<sup>69</sup> Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy*, 141.

<sup>70</sup> Mazza, *The Celebration of Eucharist*, 190.

<sup>71</sup> Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy*, 145.

<sup>72</sup> Mazza, *The Celebration of Eucharist*, 215-17.

<sup>73</sup> Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, Revised edition (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 259-64.

harm. For this reason, canon 20 of the Fourth Lateran Council required all churches to have a special place “under lock and key: so that no bold hand may get hold of them [the Body and Blood] for horrible and shameless purposes.”<sup>74</sup> As will become evident in the pages ahead, anxieties over the Eucharist being stolen by a “bold hand” often connected that hand to the wrist of a Jew.

### **Early Ritual Murder Libels and the Scapegoat Mechanism**

At this point, it should be clear that the thirteenth century was a time rife with political and religious flux, both in matters of authority and belief. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, Girard’s work gives us a means to understand the social function of persecutions, namely to reconstitute a sense of societal order and unity, while Langmuir’s approach lends support to the idea that internal anxieties over belief could be the source of a similar sense of discord. It would not be surprising, then, that when the scapegoat mechanism acts as result of a religious stimulus, the resulting accusations would take on a particularly religious character and that, as will be shown below, they did. The initially vague charge of Jewish ritual murder that was first leveled in the twelfth century, in fact, evolved to represent a specific attack on Christianity in the thirteenth century precisely when the Church was under attack itself. In other words, the religious form of the root anxiety underlying the scapegoat mechanism likewise resulted in the anti-Semitic libels taking on religious forms.

When studying ritual murder and host desecration libels, source material can be particularly problematic. Many thirteenth century cases only come to us second hand in chronicles written centuries later. It is difficult, therefore, to precisely determine to what degree the renditions that

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<sup>74</sup> IV Lateran Council, November 11, 1215. §67-70. IX-XIII. in Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century: A Study of Their Relations During the Years 1198-1254, Based on the Papal Letters and Conciliar Decrees of the Period*, Revised edition (New York: Hermon Press, 1966): 306-312.

come down to us are representative of original charges or if included motifs are the interpolations of later authors writing from a more developed ritual murder tradition. But for the early cases in English, at least, contemporary sources are available. It is true that even in very early cases, the charges usually featured two strong motifs: the draining of a Christian child's blood by Jews for use in religious and/or magical applications and the crucifixion of the child thereafter. Still, one of the two primary motivations tended to dominate. It was in the thirteenth century that the first alleged Jewish impetus for the murders consolidated: sheer animosity and a Jewish desire to harm Christians as they were thought to have harmed Christ. Central to this motif was biblical parallelism to the crucifixion. The 1255 case of Hugh of Lincoln as relayed by contemporaneous English chronicler Matthew Paris, for example, explicitly put forward that the motivation of the Jews in killing little Hugh was to "contumely and insult...Jesus Christ" by reenacting the crucifixion. The murder of little Hugh was described by Matthew Paris as follows:

They beat [the boy Hugh] till blood flowed and he was quite livid, they crowned him with thorns, derided him, and spat upon him. Moreover, he was pierced by each of them with a wood knife, was made to drink gall, was overwhelmed with approaches and blasphemies, and was repeatedly called Jesus the false prophet by his tormentors, who surrounded him, grinding and gnashing their teeth. After tormenting him in divers ways, they crucified him, and pierced him to the heart with a lance. After the boy had expired, they took his body down from the cross and disemboweled it...it was asserted to be for the purpose of practicing magical operations.<sup>75</sup>

The charge at Lincoln was not wholly without precedent but the sheer purposefulness of its inclusion of so many crucifixion motifs was.<sup>76</sup> A 1247 ritual murder charge in Valreas, France had also noted that the victim's body was allegedly found with wounds on the forehead, hands,

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<sup>75</sup> Matthew Paris, *Historia Major*, vol. 3, 138-139.

<sup>76</sup> By Crucifixion motifs I mean symbolic and narrative elements borrowed from the Christian New Testament. For the crown of thorns see John 19:2 and Matthew 27:29; for spitting, Matthew 26:67; for mocking, Matthew 27:31; for making to drink gall, Mark 15:23, Matthew 27:34; for piercing with spear, John 19:34.

and feet, indicating a crucifixion, but the “confessions” garnered from torture only mentioned a sacrifice as the motivation.<sup>77</sup>

Likewise, when the first documented medieval ritual murder charge was leveled in Norwich a century earlier, the connection to Christian religious belief was not explicit and considerable effort had to be made in order to connect the murder with the suffering of Christ. The charge had first appeared in Norwich in 1144 after the corpse of the boy William was found in a local wood. A number of local Jews were accused of having conspired to commit the crime and were summoned to court. The official charges as relayed by William’s hagiographer, Thomas of Monmouth were vague, citing the “custom the Jews are obliged to do on these days, and then from the manner of the pains inflicted and the type of wounds.”<sup>78</sup> While “type of wounds” certainly could be a reference to the crucifixion, the inclusion of this imagery could also be pointing to the prescribed methods of Jews for slaughtering animals at Passover. In either event, the precise fashion of the killing was not of *primary* concern in this, the first ritual murder libel in medieval Europe. Connection to crucifixion strengthened the case against the Jews but as yet vague conceptions of alleged Jewish rituals were sufficient on their own to stir up concern. Moreover, even Thomas’s “crowning testimony,” received from a converted Jew named Theobald, said nothing of a crucifixion but rather, forwarded the idea of a yearly ritual sacrifice of a Christian that was supposedly organized by Jews in Spain.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> The most detailed information on the Valréas case appears to come from confessions extracted under torture which are examined in Auguste Molinier, *Enquête sur un meurtre imputé aux juifs de Valréas: publiée par A. Molinier*, (Paris: H. Champion, 1883). The events are summarized along with a translation of a letter by Innocent IV to the Archbishop of Vienne dated 28 May, 1247 in Hermann Leberecht Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice: Human Blood and Jewish Ritual, an Historical and Sociological Inquiry* (London: Cope & Fenwick, 1909), 179-182. The letter is translated from Innocent and Élie Berger, *Les Registres d’Innocent IV (1243-1254) recueil des bulles de ce pape* (Paris, 1881).

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, trans. Miri Rubin (London: Penguin Classics, 2015), 32.

<sup>79</sup> Langmuir, “Thomas of Monmouth,” in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*, 23.

That the murder had anything to do with a crucifixion appears to have been an innovation of Thomas who had arrived in Norwich four years after William's death. The evidence for Jewish involvement, even as Thomas relays it in his later account was scant. The cause of the initial accusation against the Jews of Norwich was the result of a dream William's mother had before his disappearance in which she was attacked by Jews in the marketplace. When she was informed that the dead body of her son had been found, she responded by publicly lamenting that her son had been killed by the Jews.<sup>80</sup> The Jews of Norwich in the company of the local sheriff responded to a clerical summons to a local synod. With no evidence against them and with the sheriff's support, the local Jewish community refused to submit to the synod's judgment and left without punishment.<sup>81</sup> Nothing came of the charges until Thomas arrived and set out to demonstrate William's martyrdom and secure his sainthood (and a potentially lucrative local shrine).

Although it seems that the original charges referred to vague Jewish rituals, it was Thomas who focused intently on demonstrating a parallel between the Christ's suffering and death and William's murder. For instance, he noted that when the body was exhumed a month after its initial burial, the monks who washed it noticed signs of crucifixion including marks on the forehead from thorns, as well as marks on the hands and feet. Curiously, they also noticed that it looked as though the body had been "immersed in very hot and boiling water."<sup>82</sup> Another piece of evidence was that Thomas had been led to the house of a deceased Jew by the Jew's former servant, a Christian, and discovered "clear signs of the affair." Unfortunately, even when taking Thomas's own account at face value, the signs are far from clear. He points out that there *had* "as

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<sup>80</sup> E. M. Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*, 1 edition (Oxford University Press, 2015), 15-16.

<sup>81</sup> Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth," 15-17.

<sup>82</sup> Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, 37.

rumour has it," been "a post between two others and a wooden beam in the middle, attached on either side to the two other posts" but does not explain why the posts no longer remained at the point of his investigation or provide the source of the rumor. Additionally, he tries to use a lack of evidence as an argument for Jewish guilt. He points out that the Jews only pierced William's left hand and foot rather than all four extremities so that if the body were recovered, it would not look like a crucifixion and Jewish guilt would not be assumed.<sup>83</sup> That Thomas went to such lengths to support the crucifixion narrative is noteworthy. As Langmuir pointed out, equating the child's death with Christ's sacrifice lent important symbolic potency to the story and supported the sanctity of the martyr.<sup>84</sup> This Christ-like martyrdom was to become an enduring feature in the thirteenth century. In the 1287 ritual murder case of Rudolph of Berne, for example, alleged Jewish ritual does not motivate the murders but rather sheer hatred of Christians.<sup>85</sup>

The degree to which the accusation against the Jews of Norwich was representative of the scapegoat mechanism or to what degree it was caused by threats to institutional order beyond that of a single murder is beyond the scope of the present study to unravel. What is significant is that a local murder of an otherwise unexceptional youth took on a remarkably religious significance and created a template for future ritual murder cases to follow. The local authorities did not make a martyr of William upon the discovery of his body or even upon the formal questioning of local Jews. It was Thomas who constructed the religious narrative. But why did this version stick in the popular consciousness and revive interest in a case several years old? The answer likely lies in the sense of divine justice Thomas's story lent to Norwich, providing a remedy for the sense of social insecurity attendant to an unsolved murder case. This type of

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<sup>83</sup> Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth," in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>85</sup> Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice*, 187.

insecurity can be resolved one of several ways. First, time, the fading of memory, or the divergence of focus in the direction of more immediate issues can reduce even the most shocking event to nothing more than a vestigial anecdote. It appears that lacking evidence to indict the Jewish community, the case of the boy William was on the road to just such a fate.

A second way to mitigate social insecurity would be to find and punish the murderer or to find a scapegoat to punish in the true murderer's stead. Girard's model can both serve this function and act to "reverse the relationships between persecutors and their victims, thereby producing the sacred."<sup>86</sup> From this perspective, the shocking discovery of a child's mutilated body and anxieties over a killer on the loose are inverted and made right through the victory of the newly-fashioned saint in death and a multitude of powerful miracles. Through recognition of the new saint, justice could be restored. From this perspective, it appears that Thomas's hagiography used the Jewish scapegoat not merely to create Christian unity in opposition to the alleged murderers but also to unite through shared veneration.

### **Tracing Jewish/Christian Relations and the Creation of a Scapegoat**

At this point brief examples of early ritual murder libels and the *functional* role of Jews as scapegoats therein, as suggested by Girard's model, places one on track for additional study of changing ritual murder *forms* ahead. As has been shown, initially the ritual murder charge served a sanctifying function for the Christian community by creating a martyr in the child killed by Jews in the fashion of Christ. This function evolved, however, to be expressed in host desecration and eventually blood libel charges. The host desecration charge featured skeptical Jews who would test the Eucharist by stabbing or otherwise trying to harm it. In validation of the belief in transubstantiation, the host would bring forth blood, proving the validity of the Christian

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<sup>86</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 44.



message.<sup>87</sup> As will be shown in the following chapter, the blood libel charge, a culturally representative evolution of the ritual murder charge, also utilizes the function of Jew as profaner to uphold the sanctity of Christian blood. If the “scapegoat mechanism” is behind ritual murder and host desecration charges, its sanctifying function takes on an additional layer of meaning.

### **Ancient Jewish Alienation and Medieval Parallels**

At this juncture, the functional basis of Girard’s scapegoat mechanism as it applies to the birth of anti-Semitic libels beginning at the turn of the thirteenth century has generally been laid out. What still requires explanation before the *forms* of accusations are explored is how and why Jews in particular were situated as ready-made scapegoats. As both the legal status and theology pertaining to Jews traced their precedents as far back as Augustine and the decisions of pre-medieval church councils, it serves the reader to consider earlier periods of Jewish/Christian relations. While a cursory glance at the historical relationship between Jews and Christians may paint a picture of gross antagonism, such a reductionist viewpoint is not actually representative of the evolving nature of Jewish/Christian relations. Although the relationship between Christians and Jews varied by specific locale, a chronological summary of the changing legal and social status of Jews in a sample of Christian domains provides an important backdrop against which to illustrate significant shifts starting in the High Middle Ages and developing thereafter. Such a long-view mitigates the problematic assumption that turbulent relations were inevitable and reveals a multiplicity of deep-seated and historically-evolving prejudices influencing the social and legal status of medieval Jews.

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<sup>87</sup> H.H. Ben-Sasson, “The Middle Ages,” in Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 483-486.

To make any statement on “medieval law” without qualification, of course, is quite unwise. Medieval European law after all, often combined local custom with older rediscovered “Roman” law and the precise mixture of these elements varied even within the supposedly united Holy Roman Empire. As H.H. Ben-Sasson pointed out, the legal status of Jews in Europe during the middle ages is especially difficult to understand as so much of the terminology outlining the status of Jews varied geographically and assurances of rights and privileges were often fleeting.<sup>88</sup> Still, a certain shared legal and especially ecclesiastical authority did permeate much of medieval Europe. The legal proclamations of the Holy Roman Emperor concerning Jews, for example, could set local policy so long as lesser rulers were cooperative.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, sweeping pronouncements made by the Roman Catholic Church, if deemed important, circulated in multiples languages from Rome to the British Isles. The policies dictated across Christendom by the Papacy and the theological underpinning that justified them especially, helped to define the status of Jews in Christian society as ultimately different, lesser, and marginal.<sup>90</sup> As the basis of these pronouncements were earlier Roman laws as well as the ecclesiastical rulings of church fathers, we find the roots of later medieval divisions in the earliest years of the Church.

A historian familiar with many of the anxieties and grievances voiced by medieval Christians concerning Jews will likely experience déjà vu when looking at the concerns of Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries. Tracing the transmission of these anxieties over the *longue durée*

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<sup>88</sup> H.H. Ben-Sasson, "Effects of Religious Animosity on the Jews" in *History of the Jewish People*, 409.

<sup>89</sup> “The papal decretals reached every country, and the conciliar decrees were valid for the whole of Christendom. Even if they did not immediately influence the state’s Jewry legislation (in the long run, however, they inevitably did), they nevertheless seriously affected the status of the Jews...” Guido Kisch, *The Jews in Medieval Germany: A Study of Their Legal and Social Status*, Second (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1970), 353.

<sup>90</sup> In the view of Guido Kisch, the influence of medieval theological thought on the public perception of Jews in Christendom cannot be overstated: “The late-medieval conception of the Jew...fell entirely under the influence of theological thinking. Theological doctrines gained an overwhelming influence on the social evaluation of the Jew within medieval society. Fostered by all the other factors, the final product was ‘contempt and hatred which had sunk so deeply into the public consciousness that not even the highest authorities of Church and State were able to meliorate it.’” Ibid, 353.

would require the collaborative efforts of scholars familiar with a staggering breath of geographical and temporal settings if it were even a possible endeavor in the first place. Still, it suffices for our present purposes to see how early anxieties echo almost unchanged into our later period of study. Most of these concerns reflect one basic Christian axiom: that a Jew should always be of secondary station and subservient to a Christian for having denied and killed Christ.<sup>91</sup> When it seemed that this principle was threatened, persecution could erupt. Several key concerns that would become central in the high and late middle ages appear in these early centuries. First, Jewish synagogues often were an object of Christian contempt. They could be interpreted, after all, as open displays of nonconformity to the Christian message. Second, there was a distinct paranoia that Jews sought to forcibly circumcise or craftily convert (or revert) Christians to their faith. Both marriage and servitude of Christians to Jews likewise were key concerns as both could be perceived as threats to the faith. Christian servitude and conversion inverted the appropriate theological power dynamic.

These anxieties were pernicious and came to express themselves centuries later in the blood libel. It is no surprise that Jews were rarely found to have committed murders alone but usually with the aid or tacit compliance of a Christian servant or ne'er-do-well in close communion with Jews. One recalls that Thomas of Monmouth's only alleged eye-witness to the ritual murder of William of Norwich was a Christian servant. In addition to showing Thomas the site of the evil deed, she confessed to him that she unknowingly assisted in the murder by boiling the water (at the request of her Jewish employer) in which the boy William was subsumed.<sup>92</sup> An event such as

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<sup>91</sup> "But they should be oppressed by the servitude of which they rendered themselves deserving when they raised sacrilegious hands against Him who had come to confer true liberty upon them, and called His blood down upon themselves and their children." – Pope Innocent III in Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century* (The Jewish Theological Seminary Press, 2012), 53.

<sup>92</sup> Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, 59.

this was the realization of Christian anxieties about female Christian servitude. Since the fourth century, laws had been passed forbidding Jews from having Christian servants and these prohibitions were adopted throughout the middle ages in various localities and ultimately applied comprehensively to all of western Christendom with the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.<sup>93</sup> Miri Rubin in her study of the host desecration charge has made the connection between anxieties over Christian servitude to Jews as are featured in these narratives and evolving medieval legal policy explicit.<sup>94</sup> Even more to the point, medieval Christians considered the idea of their peers engaging in dealings with Jews to be a genuine threat to Christianity, as in order for a Jew to procure a Host to abuse, a Jew either had to pretend to be a Christian or, more typically, receive one from a crooked Christian seeking financial gain.<sup>95</sup>

The blood libel and other medieval anti-Semitic tropes thrived on a perception of a threat to a proper Christian world order. This order proscribed for Jews a subservient role to their Christian neighbors.<sup>96</sup> The alleged practice of nefarious Jewish rituals and especially the projection of Jewish hegemony over an innocent Christian child, was an idea well-positioned to generate a potent visceral response in a society accustomed to divinely mandated dominance. This sense of rightful Christian power was not foundational to early Christian communities but developed over time and with it, the secondary social station for Jews. In fact, in the early centuries of the Church, Christians were the *persecuted* instead of the *persecutors*. The age from the beginning of

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<sup>93</sup> S. Safrai, "From the Roman Anarchy Until the Abolition of the Patriarchate," in Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 350.

<sup>94</sup> "Servanthood emerges as particularly detrimental to a woman's faith (as it was to her chastity). Since she was likely to partake of the food, conversation and company of her Jewish employers, joint activities which late medieval legislation repeatedly attempted to uproot, her character and morality were constantly endangered." In Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 73.

<sup>95</sup> For Jews stealing Hosts by pretending to be Christians see Ibid, 35. For Christians selling the Host for money or favors see Ibid, 45 and Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 483.

<sup>96</sup> Kisch, *The Jews in Medieval Germany: A Study of Their Legal and Social Status*, 350.

the reign of Diocletian (284 AD) through the reign of Constantine (r. 306-337 AD) has been dubbed “The Age of Martyrs” and was referred to thusly by Bishop Ambrose of Milan as early as the fourth century.<sup>97</sup> The suffering and marginalization of the period resulted in a religion proud of its martyrs that viewed the injustices against them as precondition for later rewards from God.

The 313 Edict of Milan however, began the process that moved Christianity away from religion rooted in pride in its own meekness to one with an expectation to witness divine justice on Earth. First, the Edict ended the early persecutions and sought to right their wrongs by returning property to Christian communities.<sup>98</sup> A year after this edict we also see in Lactantius’s *De mortibus persecutorum*, a significant theological reframing. Its general thesis, in Ricciotti’s summation was that “those who persecute Christianity always suffer a wretched end as a punishment from God.”<sup>99</sup> God was now not only the source of salvation in the hereafter, but could be expected to act in favor of the Christian cause and defeat enemies to the faith on the temporal plane. The rightness of doctrine was not only to be seen in the scriptures but borne witness to by the order of day-to-day life.

It became important to Christian doctrine, then, that enemies and deniers of Christ could not lord over Christians lest God’s favor be challenged. Jews were both deniers and murderers of Christ so their status was of even more of concern. John Edwards, commenting on our later period, in fact, has even suggested that “It could be argued that the very nature of medieval, and indeed later Christianity was determined by the need of the younger [Christian] faith to define

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<sup>97</sup> Abbot Giuseppe Ricciotti, *The Age Of Martyrs: Christianity from Diocletian (284) to Constantine (337)*, trans. Anthony Bull, (Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books, 2015), v.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>99</sup> Ricciotti, *The Age of Martyrs*, 69.

itself against the older [Jewish faith].”<sup>100</sup> Of course, the self-definition of one group in contrast to another does not on its own necessitate suspicion, contempt, or persecution of the other group. In regard to a Christian/Jewish dichotomy however, the contrast is also tied to the idea that due to Jewish blindness to the Truth and denial of the messiah, their God-ordained status in the world was to be one of subservience and diaspora. This idea did not merely appear in the middle ages but is rooted Christian scripture, especially the writings of the Apostle Paul. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul compared Jewish blindness as represented by continued observance of the Law of the Tanakh with its more perfect realization, the “New Covenant.”<sup>101</sup> But Paul ultimately presents Jews as misguided, not wicked. It was the Christian dualists in the late second and early third centuries who situated Jews as incapable of understanding God’s true message. Paula Fredriksen in her discussion of Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, for example, notes that Justin believed the Jews never understood the metaphorical message of the scriptures and instead took them literally, “which is to say, carnally.”<sup>102</sup>

Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) for his part offered a slightly more generous evaluation of the Jewish people while simultaneously laying the foundation for the idea of a perpetual Jewish subservience that would dominate the middle ages. In his *City of God*, Augustine argued that because the Jews were the killers of Christ, it was their lot to survive in servitude, and their dispersion bore witness to their treachery, while still holding hope out for their conversion at the

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<sup>100</sup> John Edwards, *The Jews in Western Europe, 1400-1600*, First edition (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>101</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:13-15 “[we do not act like] Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds” (NRSV).

<sup>102</sup> Paula Fredriksen, “Divine Justice and Human Freedom: Augustine on Jews and Judaism, 392-398,” in Jeremy Cohen, ed., *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1996), 45.

second coming of Christ.<sup>103</sup> Fredriksen rather convincingly argues that overall, Augustine's theological sentiments on the Jewish people are surprisingly positive. She interprets Augustine as placing on the Jewish people a "discrete sin" for killing Christ in fulfillment of a necessary role in the prophecy. As such, Fredriksen argues, Augustine holds that Jews have committed a "discrete sin" and that because of this, they remain blind to the truth and are to remain a "protective witness people" until the second coming.<sup>104</sup> This theological position, adopted and expanded upon by the Church throughout the middle ages, while at times protected the Jews, also guaranteed their position as marginal and lesser.<sup>105</sup>

### **Contradictory Christian Impulses: Paternalistic Protectionism and Prejudicial Persecutions**

When one looks at the historical treatment of Jews by Christians and attempts to determine how "positive" or "negative" social or legal relations were between the two groups, one faces a certain ambiguity over what constitutes "Christian" or "Jewish" belief and behavior. Religious belief systems, after all, are not monolithic, and even if they were, religious adherents do not always behave in ways consistent with these beliefs systems or the institutions that maintain them. The present study has already made extensive appeal to the work of Gavin Langmuir due to the frequent applicability of his methodologies and the plausibility of some of the tentative

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<sup>103</sup> "But the Jews who slew Him, and would not believe in Him, because it behoved Him to die and rise again, were yet more miserably wasted by the Romans, and utterly rooted out from their kingdom, where aliens had already ruled over them, and were dispersed through the lands...and are thus by their own Scriptures a testimony to us that we have not forged the prophecies about Christ." In Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, J.J. Smith trans., (Random House: New York, 1950), 657.

<sup>104</sup> Paula Fredriksen, "Divine Justice and Human Freedom: Augustine on Jews and Judaism, 392-398," in Cohen, ed., *From Witness to Witchcraft*, 51.

<sup>105</sup> "[the Jews] should be oppressed by the servitude of which they rendered themselves deserving when they raised sacrilegious hands against Him who had come to confer true liberty upon them, and called His blood down upon themselves and their children." Innocent II quoted in Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 53.

assumptions he has used to frame the study of religion. Here again, one of his frequently applied distinctions sheds light on our query: his distinction between “religion,” and “religiosity.”

By a religion I mean what people are commanded to believe by those exercising social authority; and by religiosity I mean what individuals do in fact believe about themselves and their universe—which can vary greatly and may or may not be in harmony with what they have been told to believe.<sup>106</sup>

Langmuir’s distinction is very important to keep in mind when considering Jewish/Christian relations in any period, but especially in the middle ages and early modern era as the “official” theological position of the Church so often directly contradicted the actions of Christians inspired by personal “religiosity.”<sup>107</sup> To understand this is to avoid the pitfalls of an overly simplistic dichotomy between Jews and Christians, especially during turbulent times. For example, when religious fervor moved early thirteenth century crusaders to mob violence against Jews, the Church’s official position was to condemn such action. This position could, of course, have been the result of a genuine concern with such violence but it is also possible that untethered mob action was considered a threat to the Church’s rule of order, and that a concern with this order was so central that it could override a general anti-Judaic position. The task at hand, although fraught with challenges, is to grapple with the relationships between social actions and official positions as they pertain to the appearance and spread of ritual murder charges. This task is made a bit easier by the close relationship between temporal and religious action during much of Christian history. As will become clearer below, simultaneous outbursts

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<sup>106</sup> Gavin I Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 65.

<sup>107</sup> En route to the crusades, many Christians acted out their religious beliefs by forcibly converting or killing Jews. This was condemned by religious authorities in Rome. See David Malkiel, “Destruction or Conversion Intention and Reaction, Crusaders and Jews, in 1096,” *Jewish History* 15 (2001): 257–80.



of community violence against Jews and formal action against that same group often came hand-in-hand.

Gavin Langmuir's distinction between *religion* and *religiosity* was not new to the middle ages or even to the fourth century A.D. but represents a significant distinction dating to the time of the apostles.<sup>108</sup> Differences between official church doctrine and the beliefs and actions of the laity continued to occur in varying proportions well into the middle ages. In regard to Jews, "official" Augustinian theology in theory suggested that Jews should be protected and allowed to live in servitude, but the existence of this position did not preclude a more negative reframing of Jews by the Christian laity. One can see by the end of the fourth century, in fact, that Christian violence against open Jewish practice was increasingly frequent, regardless of the official position of the Church, which if anything was ambiguous.<sup>109</sup> The position the Church took was for high clerics to wash their hands of the matter and project a sort of impartiality.

While official dogma classified Jews as a protected group, inaction by the authorities to Christian mob violence against them could be interpreted as tacit approval. An illustrative case of an ecclesiastical response to the eruption of Christian mob violence is found in the destruction of a synagogue in the city of Callinicum in 388. Although Bishop Ambrose of Milan abstained from voicing official Church support for the destruction, he compelled secular leaders not to punish those persons who took part.<sup>110</sup> Some scholars have argued, in fact, that it was likely Ambrose's influence which led to the secular prohibition of the construction of new synagogues

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<sup>108</sup> Take for an example of the distinction between *religion* and *religiosity*, a passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians 2:14. It describes how Paul reproached the Apostle Peter (Cephas) for continuing to observe Jewish custom even though the "official" position of the gospel (for the sake of argument, we entertain here Paul's understanding as 'official') holds that Jewish custom no longer needs to be followed: "But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel [emphasis mine], I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'" Emphasis mine. *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>109</sup> Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 70.

<sup>110</sup> William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate*, (J. Aronson: Northvale, N.J., 1995), 202.

enacted in 423 AD.<sup>111</sup> He, after all, had urged emperor Theodosius to revoke an order that synagogues destroyed by Christians should be restored and Jewish property rebuilt. His argument to the emperor was based on the fact that churches had been erected on their former sites and that to remove them would be a victory for Jews against Christ's people.<sup>112</sup> As to whether Ambrose argued against the construction on *new* synagogues while it seems likely given his position on their reconstruction, the point cannot be argued with certitude due to a lack of evidence. What is important here is that the violent response of the dominant Christian religion to the presence of Jewish religious expression is one typical of those made by many communities in the high and late middle ages. Such a response likely reflects mirrored anxieties to perceived challenges to Christian identity: these moments were precisely when most Jewish ritual murder charges spread and took root.

Concerns over Jews lording over Christians, typical of the High Middle Ages, appear as early as the fourth and fifth centuries. In those earlier centuries, there was concern in Christendom about the spread of Judaism and especially Christian "reversion" to it. Emperors of both the waning Western and burgeoning Eastern empires took an active interest in combating apostasy and worked to define Christians as a class above Jewish non-believers. Constantius II (r. 337-361) both prohibited Jewish proselytism and forbade Jewish marriages to Christians as well as their ownership of non-Jewish slaves.<sup>113</sup> Further, the rule of Theodosius II (r. 402-450) ushered in prohibitions on the rebuilding of synagogues during a time when Christians were burning many down.<sup>114</sup> Such societal partitioning was the first step toward creating the separation

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<sup>111</sup> Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 74.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>113</sup> S. Safrai, "From the Roman Anarchy Until the Abolition of the Patriarchate," in Ben-Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People*, 350.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 354.

necessary for Jews to serve their much later medieval role of scapegoats. These early laws made explicit that Jews were not only different, but more importantly set the precedent that Jews should not exercise authority over or have close interaction with Christians.

For a religious group claiming supreme justness, little could be more threatening than an inversion of “proper” hierarchies of power. One can observe the depth of anxieties over these hierarchies in the early Christian empires by paying close attention to the severity of punishments against Jews accused of converting Christians to Judaism and against marriages between adherents of the two religions. Constantius introduced strict penalties for marriages of Christians and Jews. First, Christians who married Jews were obliged to surrender their property to the state. Further, any Jew who “married a Christian woman working in the imperial factories (*gynaecaea*)” was to be put to death.<sup>115</sup> These penalties evolved into explicit condemnation of the marriages as adultery under Theodosius I.<sup>116</sup> Not only were power dynamics here threatened (a Jewish husband could lord over a formerly Christian wife) but such marriages could result in apostasy and the birth of Jewish children, provided the mother left the Christian faith.

It is in looking at the severity of prohibitions against Jewish ownership of Christian slaves, however that we see an exceptionally intense obsession with societal (or cosmic) order and issues of hegemony. A concern over the maintenance of such order, we recall, can act as precondition to the creation of a scapegoat. Although, as will be shown later, Christian theology on Jewish servitude came to be quite explicitly stated during the High Middle Ages, the core belief that Jews should not hold more favorable positions in society than their Christian neighbors was one already cemented in early Christian society. The same Constantius II who issued penalties for marriages between Christians and Jews, issued similar penalties against Jews

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<sup>115</sup> William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate*, (J. Aronson: Northvale, N.J., 1995), 194.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 195.

owning slaves, Christian or otherwise. It is in the harsher punishment for owning a Christian than a “pagan” that we catch a glimpse of the heightened Christian anxiety about being under the power of those who would presume to deny Christ. For instance, the penalty for a Jew owning a pagan slave after Constantius II’s 339 law was the confiscation of the slave. A much greater penalty was meted out for the same offense, however, if the slave was a Christian. In this case, the entirety of the Jew’s property was to be forfeit. The ultimate affront, which typifies Christian anxiety toward Jews, was the prospect of Jewish circumcision of Christian slaves. In this case, the penalty for the Jewish slave owner was death.<sup>117</sup>

Fears over interreligious activity that find their roots in early Christianity laid the foundation for the resurfacing of the same concerns in the late middle ages. Interreligious servitude, marriage, and circumcision (the ultimate affront) all were considered potential attacks on the purity of the individual Christian as these actions could lead to the corruption of individual Christians and a loss of Church authority.<sup>118</sup> Lest one think that these fears were merely secular, one should turn to the third and fourth Synods of Toledo. Canon 14 of the Toledo III (582 CE) at once banned intermarriage between Christians and Jews, claimed the children of these marriages for Christianity, prescribed that no Jew could hold public office, and forbade Jews from owning slaves. The consistency of these “religious” concerns highlights how intimately entwined secular and religious law could be even when acting on independent authority. Toledo IV (633 A.D.) made one concession, however: The forced baptism of Jews was strictly forbidden, at least in theory. The threat of losing a once-baptized Christian was too radical of a thing to bear, however,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>118</sup> The forcible circumcision of Christian boys is a trope foundational to the ritual murder libel. See Gillian Bennett, “William of Norwich and the Expulsion of the Jews,” *Folklore* 116, no. 3 (December 2005): 311–314.

and the same council ruled that converted Jews, even if baptized by force, must remain Christian.<sup>119</sup>

### **Medieval Jewry Law and Ancient Antecedents**

One skeptical of the value of efforts to trace lasting ancient influences on medieval anti-Semitism in northern Europe should take note of appeals to these rulings in the later period. In a letter “to the archbishops and bishops, and all the other prelates of the Church of Germany...” dated March 5, 1233, Pope Gregory IX not only echoed these centuries-old concerns, but specifically cited the Council of Toledo as precedent.<sup>120</sup> But was this just an example of perpetually restated policy independent of contemporary events? The answer is no. Gregory did not base his argument solely on the authority of an ancient council but on the recent “general council,” or the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). While the rulings of Popes did not always have bearing on secular matters, the “vulgate version” of Gratian’s *Decretum*, a widely circulated collection of canon law, included a number of decretals on the legal status of Jews strikingly reminiscent of those issued centuries prior. They included prohibitions on Jews having Christian servants, holding public office, bringing suit against a Christian in court, and interreligious marriage. Moreover, if a Jewish man did marry a Christian woman, he was compelled to convert.<sup>121</sup>

The idea that increased legal emphasis dedicated to Jews indicates an increased concern or anxiety toward them by Christians has not been without its critics. Kenneth Pennington’s, recent

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<sup>119</sup> Richard Gottheil and Hermann Vogelstein, “Church Councils,” *JewishEncyclopedia.com - The Unedited Full Text of the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia*, accessed March 26, 2016, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4379-church-councils>.

<sup>120</sup> “And although it was decided at the Council of Toledo and likewise renewed at the General Council...” *Gregory IX to the Archbishops and Bishops and the Other Prelates of the Church of Germany*, March 5, 1233 in Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, No. 69, 199.

<sup>121</sup> Kenneth Pennington, “Gratian and the Jews,” *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law* 31, no. 1 (2014): 113-114.

work commenting on the *Decretum*'s treatment of the legal status of Jews, seems to suggest that a lack of inclusion of an independent section on Jews and the placement of sections pertaining to them haphazardly within other areas might indicate that they were not a primary concern.<sup>122</sup> Interestingly, however, it is in the mid-thirteenth century that jurists began to discuss Jews more frequently in *consilium* especially pertaining to matters of custody in cases of religious intermarriage.<sup>123</sup> Pennington notes the rise in legal interest in Jews during this time but does not venture a guess as to why. It certainly seems probable that this increased legal discussion was part-and-parcel of the generally increased interest in Jews that was occurring in ecclesiastical polemics at the time, although this increased focus also could be part of a larger trend that sought the comprehensive legal categorization of all segments of medieval society, including minority groups (e.g. heretics, lepers, etc).

It serves to note that ecclesiastical "legal" renderings of Jewish status did, in fact, have real-world influence. For but one example, one can look to the *Schwabenspiegel*, a *Rechtsbuecher* or a compilation of customary German law. This particular collection was likely written in Augsburg in 1274 or 1275 and was broadly disseminated throughout the German-speaking world. It was based on the *Sachsenspiegel*, a similar collection (c. 1221-1224) but treated problems of Jews in greater detail.<sup>124</sup> One section in particular outlines circumstances that will prevent Christians from befriending, communicating with, or having intimate relations with Jews. Apart from avoiding contact in day-to-day life, Christians are not to venture out at night, especially around Eastertime when Christians were worried Jews would mock the faith and challenge good Christian piety.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 124.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>124</sup> Guido Kisch, *The Jews in Medieval Germany: A Study of Their Legal and Social Status*, Second ed. (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1970), 34-39.

Christians are forbidden, to dine with the Jews, so that they do not eat food they have prepared. You should also never invite [Jews] to your wedding nor to do your finances...On the special day after mid-day, your doors and your windows should be closed. You should also not go in the street. That [curfew] should be longer when Easter is approaching.<sup>125</sup>

It is noteworthy that by this time, an increased Jewish threat around the time of Christian Easter and Jewish Passover is of concern, because this is precisely the time when Jews were thought to practice ritual murder. Following the above prohibitions, the “Jewish Hat” is mandated, Jews are prohibited from having Christian servants, and finally, the death penalty becomes the prescribed punishment for a Christian and a Jew having sexual intercourse: “And if a Christian man lays with a Jew, or a Jew with a Christian woman, you are both guilty of adultery, and one [of the authorities] should lay both over each other and should burn them; because the person has falsified Christian belief.”<sup>126</sup>

So as to avoid being reductionist, it is important to note that religious and secular authority in antiquity did make some “positive” rulings on Jews. Limited measures to protect Jews had also been put in place by some emperors. Honorius (d. 423 A.D.), for example, allowed Jews to own Christian slaves so long as they made no attempt to convert them. Moreover, in the Eastern Empire, Theodosius II, while escalating the use of vehement language against Jews in his eponymous Theodosian Code, issued edicts that protected Jews from mob violence.<sup>127</sup> Likewise, in some situations, Jews received similar rights and protections as Christians in various regions

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<sup>125</sup> “Den cristen ist verboten, daz sim it den iuden iht ezzent der spise, die si bereitent; si sol ouch niemant laden ze deheiner brutlouft noch ze deheiner wirtschefe....An dem antlaz tage nach mittem tage so suln ir türe und ir venster zugetan sin; si suln ouch an die straze niht gën. Daz sol also lange waren, unz der oster tac für kumet.” “Von Den Iuden,” CCXIV, 9 in Guido Kisch, *Jewry-Law in Medieval Germany: Laws and Court Decisions Concerning Jews* (Clark, N.J: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2003), 60.

<sup>126</sup> “Und ist daze in christen man bi einer iudinne lit, ode rein iude bi einem christen wibe, diu sint beidiu des überhures schuldix, und man sol sie beidiu uber einander legen, und sol sie verbrennen; wan der man hat christen gelouben verlougent.” *Schwabenspiegel* CCLXXII in Ibid, 62.

<sup>127</sup> Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism*, 196-197.

of medieval Europe. In Germany, the *Schwabenspiegel*, in fact, explicitly mandated the same punishments for identical crimes when committed by either a Christian *or* a Jew. Protections of Jews from violence were also formulated explicitly but not necessarily with magnanimous intent. Jews were protected not out of mercy alone but because they were the ‘property’ of the King, or to put it in contemporary terms, were under the King’s authority.<sup>128</sup> Regardless of whether these protections were extended out of benevolent intent or not, they are an important sign of some efforts at peaceful coexistence between Jews and Christians during the middle ages.

In terms of the papal sphere, one does well to understand that treatment of Jews was not wholly good or bad and did not proceed entirely from an official doctrinal source, but rather, varied from one pope to another as they responded to a range of contexts and concerns. In a letter sent in January 1205 by Innocent III to Philip II in response to complaints he received about the construction of a new synagogue, for example, Innocent chastised the monarch for his favorable treatment of Jews in his court stating that, “[Princes] are exceedingly offensive to the sight of the Divine Majesty who prefer the sons of the crucifers, against whom to this day the blood cries to the Father’s ears.” But Innocent did not stop there. He escalated his rebuke by claiming that “[Jews] take advantage of every wicked opportunity to kill in secret their Christian hosts.”<sup>129</sup> Still, while his qualitative statements about Jews were almost wholly negative, he repeatedly opposed mob action. First, in an 1199 Edict, Innocent derided forced baptisms performed under the threat of violence, interestingly taking the time to specifically exclude Jews who “plot against the Christian faith.”<sup>130</sup> He demonstrated his more specific concern with mob action in 1215,

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<sup>128</sup> *Schwabenspiegel* CCXIV, 1-7 in Kisch, *Jewry-Law in Medieval Germany*, 57-59.

<sup>129</sup> Innocent III to the King of France, January 16, 1205, in Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 105-107.

<sup>130</sup> Innocent III, “Constitutio Pro Judeis,” in Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, No. 5, 95.



when he commanded all of the archbishops and bishops of France to “forbid all Christians, especially crusaders, to hurt the Jews or their families.”<sup>131</sup>

Innocent’s command that crusaders not harm Jews is consistent with the Augustinian theology mentioned earlier. In his own words, “[the Jews] should be oppressed by the servitude of which they rendered themselves deserving when they raised sacrilegious hands against Him who had come to confer true liberty upon them, and called His blood down upon themselves and their children.”<sup>132</sup> But this contempt for supposed Jewish betrayal and the acknowledgment of divinely sanctioned perpetual Jewish servitude was contrasted with a Christian hope for their ultimate acknowledgment of, and redemption by, Christ. Following in the tradition of Augustine, Innocent III declared “it does not displease God, but is even acceptable to Him that the Jewish Dispersion should live and serve under Catholic Kings and Christian princes until such time as their remnant shall be saved, in those days when “Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely.”<sup>133</sup>

This generous take on Augustine, however, was increasingly going out of vogue. As Jeremy Cohen has convincingly argued, a polemical shift took place in reference to Jews starting in the mid-twelfth century and gaining broader appeal in the thirteenth. Increasing contact with Muslim militants, he argues, led to a conflation of all categories of unbelievers into infidels. The result was that Jews no longer were seen as having killed Christ due to their natural lack of reasoning faculties but were now seen as having intentionally attacked and murdered Christ.<sup>134</sup> This increasingly antagonistic characterization resulted in what Rubin has called a “juxtaposition of

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<sup>131</sup> Innocent III to the Archbishops and Bishops of France, 1215-16 in *Ibid*, No. 32, 143.

<sup>132</sup> Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 53.

<sup>133</sup> Innocent III to the King of France, January 16, 1205, in *Ibid*, No. 14, 105.

<sup>134</sup> Jeremy Cohen, “The Muslim Connection or On the Changing Role of the Jew in High Medieval Theology,” in Cohen ed., *From Witness to Witchcraft*, 141-162.

Jew and Eucharist,” ultimately causing miraculous host “narratives to increasingly...include the host as the object of Jewish abuse, as bearing the tenderness of a child within it.”<sup>135</sup> In a developing narrative tradition of host desecration and other stories featuring Jewish harm of Christians, a new figure came to exist that was an *active threat* to the Christian community. The old concept of passive Jewish servility was being replaced in popular Christian conception with a constructions of active and threatening Jewish antagonists that found expression in later libels. The following chapter will explore the development of this active threat in more detail.

With a general understanding of how the Jewish people became physically and culturally different and, to large degree, marginal, the reader now can return to the charges under consideration. At this point it will be useful to outline these charges in more detail. First, it should be understood that host desecration and ritual murder charges, while employing separate tropes, were intimately related and should be considered variations on a theme. Both narratives relied essentially on threat of Jewish harm to the Christian *body*. This means both the eucharistic body of Christ in the form of the Host as well as the bodies of individual Christians bound by their communion with the former. If a righteous Christian approached the Eucharist with reverence and respect, the antithetical Jew in the minds of many medieval Christians was expected to treat it with disdain. This perceived antipathy was noted in a general letter by Innocent III concerning issues in France generally: “...on Good Friday the Jews, contrary to old custom, publicly run to and fro over the towns and streets, and everywhere laugh, as is their wont, at the Christians because they adore the Crucified One on the Cross, and, through their improprieties, attempt to dissuade them from their worship.”<sup>136</sup> It is a short jump from the view that Jews would mock the very body of Christ to one in which they would seek to do it harm. It

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<sup>135</sup> Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 27.

<sup>136</sup> Innocent III to the King of France, January 16, 1205, in Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, No. 14, 109.

is, as we will see, but another short step between the motifs of ritual murder and those of the desecration libel.

Excellent work had been done by Miri Rubin demonstrating the similitude of ritual murder and host desecration motifs in her book *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*. The book primarily focuses on the host desecration charge and outlines a working template of the host desecration libel from varied source material. To summarize her template: First, a Christian from the margins of society “most frequently a woman, often a debtor and sometimes a maid employed by the Jews” agrees to sell the consecrated host to a Jew or Jews. Following this, a group of Jews assemble to abuse this host through a variety of means most of which recall in some way Jesus’s crucifixion. At this point there is a little more variety between various versions of the narrative but the Host generally resists destruction or corruption miraculously. Often, a vision of the Christ child, with or without the Virgin Mary appears to bear witness against the Jews’ denial that the Host is in fact the literal body of Christ. Frightened at being discovered and punished for their deed, they then try to hide the evidence, often in a “place of filth” like a cesspool. Again, bearing witness to the Truth of Christianity, the Host reveals itself through one of a variety of means such as miraculous light, sound, or self-unearthing. Following this, the Jewish plot is revealed, the Jewish murderers are punished, and the miraculous Host typically becomes a local relic open to providing its own auxiliary miracles in the future.<sup>137</sup> The ritual murder template is virtually identical, differing only with the substitution of a Christian child for the Host and a few other possible minor changes. One variation is that the child is not always (though is still often) sold by a Christian to Jews but is rather kidnapped as with William of Norwich. The ritual murder charge also adds an additional variation in motivation. While

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<sup>137</sup> Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 44-45.

abusing the child, particularly through means of crucifixion, is a central motivation (at least until the fifteenth century) the motivation also could be the acquisition of the child's blood for religious, medical, or magical purposes. These elements were not always mutually exclusive, and the child could be crucified while being drained of blood. More obscene perhaps still, the Christian child, who was to my knowledge almost always male, was typically circumcised, symbolically lowering him to the status of a Jew; to borrow Bynum's phrasing, a "desecration that makes holy."<sup>138</sup>

These perceptions were not merely the work of polemicists but had real bearing on the shape of the society that believed these charges. As demonstrated in Rubin's host desecration template, it was typically a Christian who served as an accessory to Jewish plots. This is a manifestation of a concern clearly demonstrated by the canons of ecclesiastical councils and the letters of popes. While Lateran III (1179) in canon 26 had sought to forbid the Jewish ownership of Christian slaves or Jewish employment of Christian wet nurses or domestic servants, such practices were clearly still occurring in parts of Europe into the thirteenth century, as Lateran IV (1215) found it necessary to mandate that Jews be differentiated from Christians by dress so that religious identity could not be accidentally mistaken.<sup>139</sup> Localized charters such as those negotiated between local church leadership and the Jewish communities of Speyer and Worms had long subverted the official Church position against Christian servitude to Jews but in 1236, even after Lateran IV, Frederick II extended these local Jewish privileges of ownership by extending the terms of the 1157 Charter of Worms to all the Jews of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>140</sup> The major issue of concern expressed in Lateran IV, it seems, is the possible (or to them probable)

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<sup>138</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 16.

<sup>139</sup> IV Lateran Council, November 11, 1215, in Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 297.

<sup>140</sup> James Parkes and Morton C. Fierman, *The Jew in the Medieval Community*, Second Updated edition (New York: Hermon Press, 1976), 164.

corruption of Christian servants by their Jewish employers. The local ecumenical Council of Paris, made this explicit:

We decree, under pain of excommunication, that no Christian women shall nurse Jewish children, and that no Christian midwives shall assist at a Jewish childbirth; nor shall any other Christian serve them, lest through the superficial plausibility of their law, which they wickedly pretend to explain, they may lead into the pit of their disbelief the Christian servants who dwell with them.<sup>141</sup>

The inverted power dynamic discussed earlier was still a primary concern but in addition, the threat of Jews using this inversion permanently to separate a Christian from the faithful was an egregious abuse of the Jewish employer's dominant position. In a letter to the archbishops and bishops of Germany written in 1233, Gregory IX claimed that some Jews had "force[ed] [Christian slaves] to become circumcised and compel[ed] them [to] become Jews."<sup>142</sup> And he did not merely see mingling as a problem only in the German context. In the same year, he wrote the Archbishop of Compostella to complain that Jews were not being forced to wear different clothing and that this could cause Christians and Jews to "wickedly mingle with one another's women."<sup>143</sup> When writing to the King of Hungary, Gregory lamented that such mixing was so bad that some Christians even took Jewish women to wife.<sup>144</sup> This was no idiosyncratic preoccupation of Gregory's either. His successor, Innocent IV in a letter to the King of France in 1244 ordered that Jews be prevented from employing Christian "nurses, or other Christian servants" both under the traditional logic preventing Christian servitude to a Jew "lest the children of free-born serve the children of the maid-servants" as well as the concern that "they shamefully suffer [Christian servants] to do things which bring confusion upon the Faith."<sup>145</sup> It is

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<sup>141</sup> Emphasis mine. VIII Council of Paris, 1213 in Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, VIII, 307.

<sup>142</sup> Gregory IX to the Abbot and the Prior of Pruel and to the Provost of Ripen in the Diocese of Regensburg, March 31, 1227 in Ibid, 199.

<sup>143</sup> Gregory IX to the Archbishop of Compostella and His Suffragans, May 18, 1233, in Ibid, 205.

<sup>144</sup> Gregory IX to Andrew, the Illustrious King of Hungary, August 12, 1233 in Ibid, 209.

<sup>145</sup> Innocent IV to the King of France, May 9, 1244 in Ibid, 253.

little wonder that a Christian who had intercourse with Jews was typically viewed as being nearly as culpable in host desecration and blood libel narratives as the accused themselves.

This chapter has covered quite a bit of ground, exploring the connections between power struggles between popes and monarchs, changes in eucharistic devotion, and the social distancing of the Jewish community from their Christian neighbors. While examining such a range of foci has required broad strokes, the approach taken was necessary. For to understand the phenomenon of anti-Semitic libel, one must first understand its foundations and purpose. To achieve this end, becoming aware of parallels between Christian hostility and legal marginalization of Jews drawn between the ancient and medieval periods are illuminating. What is more, by taking these vastly different contexts into consideration yet finding like responses to similar anxieties, one is able to see how Girard's scapegoat mechanism stands at the heart of persecutions. But Girard's model benefited from expansion. Not only do anxieties rooted in a perception of cosmological order relate to the creation of scapegoats, but the nature of these anxieties influences the *form* of the scapegoat construction. The growth in a new (or newly emphasized) type of eucharistic piety opened the door for the fashioning of Jews by Christians into a threat to the Eucharist. As we will see ahead, the forging of associations between this very Eucharist and child harm set the stage for ritual murder and host desecration libels to flourish in the fourteenth century and beyond.

## CHAPTER II

### **A More Menacing Jew: A Consideration of *Das Jüdel* as a Reaction to a Thirteenth Century Polemical Context**

The last chapter explored evolving Christian/Jewish social relations over several centuries and showed how a Jewish scapegoat evolved by way of the ritual murder libel to address thirteenth century Christian anxieties stemming from perceptions of societal disorder. These constructions relied on the early formation of symbolic associations between supposed Jewish ritual and the harm of Christians. Scholars Denise Despres and Miri Rubin have both pointed out that ritual murder and host desecration libels rely at least in part on a framework of such associations, what Despres refers to as “symbol clusters,” which although “enigmatic to the modern eye, affirm both medieval Catholic doctrine and attendant cultural prejudices.”<sup>146</sup> Building upon this perspective, we can begin to unearth the roots of these symbol clusters in order to better understand the cause of later waves of anti-Semitic libel in thirteenth and fourteenth century German lands. To this end, an examination of “*Das Jüdel*,” a late twelfth/early thirteenth century adaptation of the story of “The Jewish Boy,” an older sixth century tale of Marian devotion, provides a window through which to examine the formation of a new and increasingly negative Jewish caricature that became fundamental to later libels, i.e. a Jewish antagonist not only hostile to Christianity generally but also to the sacred Eucharist, and

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<sup>146</sup> Denise Despres, “Mary and the Eucharist: Cultic Anti-Judaism in Some Fourteenth-Century English Devotional Manuscripts,” in Jeremy Cohen, ed., *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1996), 384.

through attacks on the Host in its representation as the Christ child, all Christian children.<sup>147</sup>

“*Das Jüdel*” represents a snapshot of a significant transitional point in the development of anti-Semitic symbol clusters in thirteenth century German devotional literature and the fashioning of Jews and Judaism into a category set in diametric opposition to Christian society. But to truly understand this transitional moment and how it relates to the formation of the anti-Semitic literary tropes underlying later libels, one must also understand that Jews and Christians were not only influenced by these tropes but contributed directly to their development.

Before one can understand the significance of this transitional moment, however, one must first become familiar with the basic plot of the story of “The Jewish Boy” in order for later changes and additions to be evident at all. The core narrative in both the earliest and latest versions, features a pious Jewish child who visits a Christian church with his playmates and receives the Eucharist. The child then returns home to tell his father about the truth of Christ, and an argument ensues. The father ultimately decides he must kill the boy by throwing him in a burning oven, either in anger or as a sacrifice in supposed accordance with Jewish Law. The boy is protected from the flames by the Virgin Mary, however, and ultimately the Jews see the error of their ways.<sup>148</sup> When the tale was rediscovered and grew in popularity in the twelfth century, new imagery was introduced: a vision of the Host as the Christ Child. This new element served to underpin the legitimacy of the doctrine of transubstantiation by revealing the host to be literal flesh typically hidden from the faithful.<sup>149</sup> In the same way, when in the host desecration charge, the Host bled upon being stabbed, Christian belief was affirmed. The role of the Jew in this text

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<sup>147</sup> For a brief but thorough survey of the transmission of the story of the Jewish Boy, see Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 9-15.

<sup>148</sup> Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 8-9.

<sup>149</sup> Despres, “Mary of the Eucharist,” 376-377.



and others was as an antagonist who blindly adhered to the old Law and in that capacity confirmed the younger Christian religion as the rightful purveyor of Truth.

The connections to ritual murder are fairly clear. First, a child is killed in accordance with supposed Jewish Law. Additionally, host desecration elements, such as the throwing of the child/host in the oven, the miraculous protection of said child, and the vindication of Christian belief are all present. The story's revival and the inclusions of these themes might not have been coincidental but rather may well constitute early seeds of the negative Jewish archetypes required by the libel. But one must first ask if the broader context supports this hypothesis.

Before proceeding to particulars, a general history of the story is required. The story in its earliest form, the aforementioned sixth century version was relayed in both Evagrius Scholasticus's (c. 536-600) *Historia Ecclesiastic* as well as Gregory of Tours's (d. 595) *De gloria martyrum*. Both versions were bereft of a vision of the Host as child, a distinctly Eucharistic image. The story at this stage was, after all, meant to inspire Marian devotion not Eucharistic piety. Only later renditions altered the original source material to support both a message of Mary's mercy as well as a testament to the power of the Sacrament. It is unsurprising that Eucharistic imagery was introduced to the story by Paschasius Radbertus (c. 785-866 CE), the same early proponent of transubstantiation discussed in the previous chapter. But the inclusion of the Eucharistic vision had little impact until several centuries later, and it was Gregory's earlier version of the story without the eucharistic vision that dominated the early Middle Ages. The vision also was not included in Anselm of Bury's seminal Latin Marian corpus assembled c. 1125. Late-medieval variations drawing on Anselm's work, however, did include the vision. The versions of both Honorius of Autun and William of Malmesbury (c. 1090-1143) featured a scene in which the Eucharist is revealed to the Jewish Boy as a literal

child who is subsequently divided and distributed throughout the congregation. Honorius's version, in fact, even featured the Jewish boy bringing literal "flesh" home after the service!<sup>150</sup>

One must consider the reason underlying the inclusion of this new motif in these later versions of the story as well as in "*Das Jüdel*," the present version being considered.

While "Eucharistic," the vision of the Host as Christ Child was but one symbol in an increasingly complex web of associations that moved the conception of the Jew closer to a state of villainy that could support ritual murder and host desecration constructions. Another necessary association was that of archetypal Jews as willing killers of Christ or Christians. These associations developed and traveled throughout the Latinized world. Miri Rubin pointed out one such shift that began with the translation of "The Jewish Boy" into French by the poet Adgar (c. 1165-72). The story, she suggests, spread to the continent and became "as much a tale of child abuse as [a tale glorifying] the power of the Virgin..."<sup>151</sup>

*Das Jüdel* belongs to this same new narrative tradition as is confirmed by R. Sprenger's dating of its composition near the close of the twelfth century based on stylistic considerations like meter, rhyme, and other linguistic signposts.<sup>152</sup> The story in this iteration is one of striking polarity. It contrasts a Jewish obsession with virility and machismo directly with the feminine mercy of the Virgin and the vulnerability of children. The Jewish father jeers at his own son and mocks Christ's fate at the hands of the Jews as proof that they are God's chosen. When in this version the Jewish Boy is thrown into the flames and is saved by the Virgin Mary, Christian faith defeats Jewish blind ritual observances and Christian mercy conquers Jewish cruelty and hubris.

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<sup>150</sup> Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 9-11.

<sup>151</sup> Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, Revised ed. edition (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 137.

<sup>152</sup> [Lines 129-43] R. Sprenger, "Die Legende vom Judenknaben," *Germania*, Vierteljahrsschrift für Alterthumskunde (1882), 137.

It is this same contrast between innocent but faithful child martyrs and insidious/calculating Jews that runs through even the earliest ritual murder libels.<sup>153</sup> Through broader cultural reinforcement of standard tropes in both folk memory and a growing anti-Semitic narrative tradition, these characterizations reached a critical mass that resulted not in isolated ritual murder and host desecration charges as had happened in earlier decades, but rather resulted in contagious waves of accusations. To better understand how these tropes were introduced and reinforced, however, one is obliged to take a deeper look at the stories featuring them.

*Das Jüdel* opens in “a large city that rich Jews possessed.” “There, one [Jew] let his son go to the Christian school, and [there] he learned to act with wisdom.” The child’s innocent struggle between listening to his father, holding firmly to his religion, and developing a love for the Christian faith, create constant tension in the narrative. At school, the boy initially refrains from joining in singing or reading so as not to participate in Christian practice. It is with divine help that the boy is brought into the true faith. His error in practice is not willful and his innocence allows for its correction. The boy’s daily walk home takes him straight past the local church. It is here, under a tree where he would stop to rest that the boy falls in love with a “masterful image” of the Virgin Mary. The boy asks his schoolteacher who this woman is and is told that “she [is] our Lady...the almighty God’s mother.” His teacher then explicates Mary’s mercy and goodness.

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The school teacher’s explanation of Mary is the straw that breaks the camel’s back, and the boy is no longer able to contain his naturally pious nature and keep to the Jewish faith. From that

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<sup>153</sup> One does not have to strain to notice striking thematic parallels between stories like “The Jewish Boy” and ritual murder narratives. The motifs of the innocent boy, the nefarious Jew, and the protective maternal figure all make a showing in but a single sentence of Thomas of Monmouth’s account of the murder of William of Norwich. “The innocent boy agreed to the insistent traitor, but the mother resisted...fearing for her son with a maternal instinct.” Thomas Of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, trans. Miri Rubin (London: Penguin Classics, 2015), 15.

<sup>154</sup> [Lines 28-79] Sprenger, “Die Legende vom Judenknaben,” 130-131.

point on, the boy prays daily at the image and, as the source points out, did so in a way consistent with Christian custom. In addition, the boy began to learn about Christianity “by and by.” The Virgin Mary, for her part, takes compassion on the gentle boy and is moved to his support: “Our Lady did not forget about him, her small child. She herself prayed for him increasingly [and] she pledged [to support him] with good force.”<sup>155</sup> This entire sequence of religious alienation, the Jewish boy’s piety against the odds, and Virgin’s compassion for even a non-baptized Jew combine to present Christianity as a religion based on a personal *relationship* with God and his intercessors. It is a religion based on faith, and that faith, even if incompletely manifested (the boy had as-yet not been baptized, taken communion, or become openly Christian) offered God’s grace, a powerful aid to the pure-in-heart. This, as we will see, is in stark contrast to how the practice of Judaism is depicted.

The final victory of Christian Truth over Jewish blindness thereto involves the Eucharist. The Jewish boy’s reluctant but gradual acceptance of participation in the Christian community eventually culminates in his attending a Christian service, including the Mass. The story describes how: “On an early morning occasion [the school children] prepared therefore, and went to the church [and] truly received the holy body of Christ.”<sup>156</sup> The “occasion” appears to be Maundy Thursday of the Easter season.<sup>157</sup> While *Das Jüdel* does not explicitly provide a date or time of year, a placement in the Easter season is consistent with other versions of the story.<sup>158</sup> As

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<sup>155</sup> [Lines 85-107] Sprenger, “Judenknaben,” 131.

<sup>156</sup> [Lines 109-114] Sprenger, “Judenknaben,” 131.

<sup>157</sup> “Early morning occasion” is rendered here from “*antlâzmorgen fruō*.” As the story is presented in the form of a poem, its language responds to fit the rhyme and meter. Still, the use of conjunction seems to indicate the setting. The phrasing seems to indicate that we are talking about a special church Occasion one “early morning” rather than the text indicating that “One early morning [they had] occasion [to]...” The present author has not been able to find the term used in any Middle High German dictionary. Alfred Götze’s *Frühneuhochdeutsches Glossar*, however, lists “antlaßtag” and provides “Gründonnerstag,” or Maundy Thursday as a synonym.

<sup>158</sup> Denise Despres notes that thirteenth and fourteenth century versions place the event either on the Feast of the Assumption or Easter and suggests that this “points to the Eucharistic imagery at the heart of the tale in fourteenth-century devotional manuscripts.” She makes no note of versions placing the event on Maundy Thursday or the

will be seen, context suggests the events of this version coincide with the Jewish festival of Passover or Pesach. As Maundy Thursday is the Christian holy day commemorating Jesus's last Passover meal with his disciples, one can reasonably assume the context.

For being the central impetus for the Jewish boy's conversion, the Eucharistic ceremony and the vision of the Christ-child are rather briefly conveyed.

On the altar appeared the most beautiful child of all, that lo! was revealed to your eyes. The Priest broke flesh therefrom [the child] and gave it to the people in the mouth. Here forever he [Christ] is completely immersed [in the Father] for a thousand years, more beautiful and stronger thence and unending as one residing with the True [God].<sup>159</sup>

While the literal nature of the Eucharist is revealed in the story by the vision of the Christ child, the exact nature of the miracle remains vague either to preserve the mystery or to avoid the grotesque. The text only mentions that the Jewish boy saw the Host as a literal child from whom "the priest broke flesh."<sup>160</sup>

It is the vision itself that testifies to the validity of transubstantiation without the necessity of including more descriptive and perhaps gruesome language about the flesh after it is broken.

What matters is that the revelation shows a true miracle, always present but normally hidden from view to a soul of pure faith. "There to the child's eyes, the secret greatness of God was so openly revealed, [so that he] then also desired to receive a piece of the same food."<sup>161</sup> The way in which the Eucharist is administered is relayed in no extraordinary fashion. The text merely notes that it "began hard and softly dissolved [into a] mixture thereunder."<sup>162</sup> The atypical and miraculous nature of the vision is revealed when the story recounts that the other people in the

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possible symbolic significance of a placement during Pesach being indicative of ritualistic overtones. See Despres, "Mary and the Eucharist," 385-386.

<sup>159</sup> "unz im ûf dem altaere erschein der aller schoenist kinde ein daz dehein ouge ie übersach. Der briester vleisch dar abe brach unt gab ez den liuten in den munt dô dûht ez in wol tûsent stunt schooner unde sterker danne ê und entet niht al sim waere wê. [Lines 117-124] Sprenger, "Judenknaben," 131.

<sup>160</sup> "der briester vleisch dar abe brach," [Line 120] Sprenger, "Judenknaben," 131.

<sup>161</sup> [Lines 127-131] Ibid, 131.

<sup>162</sup> [Line 132] Ibid, 131.

church did not fully realize that the food they were taking was truly the body of the man to whom they had been praying.<sup>163</sup> But, as the text continues, it is made clear that Christ and the Eucharist are one in the same. “He is the body of the Christian community. There [the congregation] received the living bread and [so too did] this child and [both] were very happy.”<sup>164</sup>

The events depicted served to show that the Christian faith was the correct one as transubstantiation is no ordinary ritual but, is in fact, extraordinary. The evidence for this belief is the clear miracle unfolding before the child and the intimate, even personal, compassion that led the Jewish boy to see the truth against all odds. The miracle is made even more powerful by the fact that even a Jew, a figure expected to deny Christ’s divinity was able to see it “so openly.” The innocent acceptance of the tangible truth before the child’s eyes no doubt appealed to the same type of sympathy for which the children martyred in blood libel narratives did. Both the blood libel and the story of the Jewish boy make use of a potent contrast between an innocent childlike Christian faith set against skeptical and/or scornful Jews.

The boy returns home where his family is making Jewish festival preparations. The particular festival indicated is Pesach, or Passover. More specifically, this part of the story takes place on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the Jewish month Nisan, also known as the “Fast of the First Born” or *ta’anit habechorium*. It is unlikely that the narrator’s choice of this particular holiday was incidental but rather, it is probably a conscious choice on the part of the author to suggest a connection between Judaism and child harm. On the “Fast of the First Born” which occurs the day before Pesach, all firstborn Jewish males are to fast in remembrance of the tenth plague in which, according to the

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<sup>163</sup> “die liute nâmen sîn niht war noch der here der daz ambet tete [136] nâch sîner ê an der stete.” [Line 135] Ibid, 131.

<sup>164</sup> [Lines 137-139] Ibid, 131.

Tanakh, all firstborn Egyptian males were killed while the Jews of the Egyptian captivity were spared. The fast is broken at sundown (15 Nisan) when Passover begins and a ritual meal is shared.<sup>165</sup> So when the boy first arrives home his father asks him, “Son, where have you been? It is almost meal time. We will feed you and [you will] fast after.”<sup>166</sup> The boy answers that he will not eat as he has already.<sup>167</sup> He then recounts the events that happened earlier at the Church and presents the good news that the child he saw broken had been sent for that purpose for all, implying that this sacrifice applied to the Jews as well.<sup>168</sup> It is not Christ’s textual sacrifice to which the boy appeals but rather to the living reality of the transubstantiation, an experienced miracle clearly proving the superiority of the Christian way.

This miracle, the Word revealed in the flesh, proven by the vision of the Eucharist as a beautiful child, is sharply contrasted by the father’s reception of the news. He says, “You are raving” to which the boy responds that he is merely filled with joy.<sup>169</sup> The author contrasts the personal, relational, and immanent Christian faith as just recounted by the son with the impersonal, mechanistic, and backward-looking Jewish religion as represented by the father’s speech. The Jewish father tells his son that he is being “too noble-minded about this” and argues that the boy should keep to the faith of his people. “God wants [you to] live and to do as your father has done. Who, like a faithful servant, he has kept our religion.”<sup>170</sup> As an aside to God, he continues:

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<sup>165</sup> See “Pesach” in Wayne D Dosick, *Living Judaism: The Complete Guide to Jewish Belief, Tradition, and Practice* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 162-174.

<sup>166</sup> [Lines 143-145] Sprenger, “Judenknaben,” 132.

<sup>167</sup> [Line 146] Ibid, 132.

<sup>168</sup> “der rât geliebt in allen. Man hiez daz kint dar für gân dâ erz hête in getân.” [Lines 173-174] Sprenger, “Judenknaben,” 132.

<sup>169</sup> “si sprâchen ‘du tobest’. ‘nein ich bin fruot’” [Line 178] Sprenger, “Judenknaben,” 132.

<sup>170</sup> “wil got, lebe unde tuo als dîn vater habe getân. Der hât al sein getriuwer man unser ê behalten.” [Lines 182-185] Ibid, 132.

You want your people [with] courage<sup>171</sup> to return to worldly wisdom. So you will keep [us] inside of this [original covenant]. Therefore he [the boy] will join to you and with us turn back to God. Then you will judge and totally forgive your people's useless ignorance. So, we must direct our hearts [and] look and act on you.<sup>172</sup>

The some thirty lines that follow seek to emphasize that Jews value power and consider it their duty to exercise this power in opposition to Christianity. The characterization of Jews thus developed is both generally hostile and creates symbolic associations between Judaism and child harm. Never, in the father's view, should Jews abandon this privileged position to follow one who was given over to the Jews to be killed.

[210-212] The Truth was born in us [The Jews] to cause the child great suffering. And we should [follow] our way, never [following] theirs [by] eating before him...[220-229] His holy father should have kept him so that [harm] was not done [to him]. So we read in the law [it was] begun. [By] his hands to the worthy elect, he gave us judgment over the child. He also did not interrupt our old law from the highest position. And we have [since kept] ours and hence forever more, [even] should your other [covenant] arrive.<sup>173</sup>

The speech to this point, and the general tone of the Jewish father suggest an inability of Jews to grasp the truth of the Christian religion. He seems to believe that even if the sacrifice of Jesus or the Christ-child had been voluntary, it was not God's design. God would never sacrifice himself so meekly. The elect position of the Jews in their sacred texts and their execution of earthly power over Christ, to him, are evidence against the deluded position held by Christians.

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<sup>171</sup> "Courage" here is rendered from the German "muot" meaning power, manliness, resolve as per Latin *virilitas*. The masculine connotations are intentional to the poem's use of the word. Elsewhere "muot" is directly contrasted with "wîbîn," or women. "nû sehe wir wol daz sich verkêret hât iuwer menlîch muot ze wîbîn siten." [Lines 268-269] Ibid, 133.

<sup>172</sup> "wil du dînen muot kêren ze menlîchen sinne, sô wirdestu des wol inne daze z dir ze staten kumt hie bî uns unt wider got gefrurzant. dune wellest aber dich mâzen und uns vil gar erlâzen diner unnutzen tumbheit, sô müez wir unser herzen leit an dir tuon unde sehen." [Lines 187-196] Ibid, 132.

<sup>173</sup> [Lines 210-214] "[si sprâchen] 'uns ist waerlîch geborn das kint zuo grôzem sere, unt sul wir unser êre niemêr vor im gefristen, gevreiscent ez die kristen:' ... [Lines 220-229] "sîn vater solde ez haben bewart sit er des niht hât getân, sô laze wir in daz reht began. Sîn hende des wol wert sint daze r uns richet über daz kint also daz unser alte ê ungestoeret von im bestê unt wir dâ haben unser ê runt hinnen für immer mêr dheinen andern des dürfe gelangen" in Sprenger, "Judenknaben," 133.



Although to this point the statements of the Jewish father are fairly restrained for an antagonist who would soon throw his son into the flames, the speech takes a sharp negative turn. The words in short order become jeering and cynical: “He has slain himself. You broke up his flesh with [your] jowls: He himself pathetically spoke to [God]. ‘Oh! I am so meek! How little I am pitied by the Almighty God! I should have kept his [God’s] command that I must never revive!’”<sup>174</sup> These statements seem to harken to the gospel of Matthew 27:46 where Jesus is depicted as vulnerable on the cross.<sup>175</sup>

At this point it is pertinent to consider if the poem’s characterizations mirror or parody the Christian author’s exaggerated perception of real world Jewish criticisms of Christianity. It is true that the jeers and insults of the Jewish father directed at the Christ child make sense as simply the narrative choices of the author. After all, the arc of the plot demands the denial of Christianity by the antagonist as precondition for the victory of the Truth. But just as acceptance of the doctrine of transubstantiation inspired the inclusion of the literalistic vision of the Christ child in new renditions of “The Jewish Boy,” characterizations of Jewish and Christian religious arguments could be drawn from the author’s actual context. It serves one’s understanding of the poem to attempt to reconstruct this context to see what insights could be gained.

Thus far it has been suggested that stories like the Jewish boy fed into a context of antisemitism by introducing and/or perpetuating negative stereotypes of Jews as aggressively combative and even physically threatening to Christians and Christianity. But the creation of these harmful caricatures did not occur in a vacuum but can be seen as gross distortions and

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<sup>174</sup> “er hêt sich selben nâ erslagen. sîn vleisch er ab den wangen brach: ze im selben er jaemerlîchen sprach ‘owê, ich vil arme! wie lützel ich erbarme den almeh got. Sol ich behalten ditz gebot, daz müeze ich nimmer geleben.’” [Lines 234-241] Sprenger, “Judenknaben,” 133.

<sup>175</sup> ““And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”” (NRSV).

misrepresentations crafted from what little understanding of real Jewish religious practice the author knew. Indeed, a fairly accurate familiarity with the Jewish festival Pesach (Passover) is clear in the text. This is not surprising as this particular festival involved some Christian participation. The festival required Jews to dispose of *chemetz*, or foods forbidden for consumption during the holiday. The term specifically refers to leavened bread but can be used more broadly to refer to anything that is prohibited during Passover. On the morning before Passover, all *chemetz* found in a Jewish home is to be ritually burned. Christians were certainly aware of this practice as in order to avoid the wholesale destructions of temporarily prohibited foods, *chemetz* was ritually “sold” to Christian neighbors until the festival ended and the ceremonial contract lapsed. Any remaining *chemetz* found in the home was to be ritually burned. A Christian misinterpretation of this practice presuming that Jews would dispose of anything not defined as “Jewish” through an inaccurate and fantastically loose interpretation could be at the heart of the brutal treatment of the Jewish Boy in the story as his father throws him in the oven as one would *chemetz*.<sup>176</sup> In fact, the Jewish Father goes so far as to lament the action but commits it regardless because in his own words he is “very strongly enslaved to the commandments on the Law.”<sup>177</sup>

### **Reconstructing Context, Insights from Jewish/Christian Polemics**

In the pages above it was put forward that *Das Jüdel* offers a window through which to explore a transitional period in the construction of a conception of Jews as new symbolic associations were fed by and in turn fed into anti-Semitic prejudices. Having spent some time

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<sup>176</sup> Dosick, *Living Judaism*, 166.

<sup>177</sup> “Now forgive me [for his sins] through God. I am very strongly enslaved to the commandments on the Law.” “nû erlât mich sîn durch got. Ich hân vil starke knehte: den gebietet bî dem rehte...” [Lines 276-278] in Sprenger, “Judenknaben,” 133.

examining the poem's narrative characterizations, it is now necessary to shift focus from the literary to the polemical in order to understand the broader context of this shift to increasingly negative literary representation. Vague indications of the author's familiarity with Jewish ritual observances while interesting, are too speculative to be of much worth. More valuable are the many indications that the Jewish Father's arguments against Christ's divinity in fact *were* drawn from formal polemics circulating at the time. While it is hard to precisely gauge the circulation or impact of Jewish anti-Christian polemics in this period as the known texts are so few and Christian references to Jewish arguments often lacking or indirect, it remains curious in light of the present line of inquiry that the first such works to appear in Europe outside of Spain were written during the same period when the story of "The Jewish Boy" was beginning to experience a revival. Jewish anti-Christian polemics had been written before this time but composition of works in the genre was generally confined to societies under Islamic rule, from the ninth century onward.<sup>178</sup> One of these texts "the Judeo-Arabic *Qissat Mujādalat al-Usquf* (*The Account of the Disputation of the Priest*)" was translated into Hebrew as "*Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer* (*The Book of Nestor the Priest*)."<sup>179</sup> According to Daniel Lasker, it was authored by "An anonymous Jewish translator, working before 1170 presumably in Iberia"<sup>179</sup> A more exact date appears to be unknown. What is certain, though, is that *Nestor* served as the basis for new Jewish anti-Christian polemics first formally explicated in Christian Europe by two works around the 1170s: Joseph Kimhi of Narbonne's *Sefer Habrit* and Joacob ben Reuven's *Milhamot Hashem*.<sup>180</sup> Like the Jewish Father, these works took odds with the meekness of Christ's sacrifice and with the

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<sup>178</sup> Daniel J. Lasker, "Jewish-Christian Polemics at the Turning Point: Jewish Evidence from the Twelfth Century," *The Harvard Theological Review* 89, no. 2 (1996): 166.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>180</sup> Joel E. Rembaum, "The Influence of 'Sefer Nestor Hakomer' on Medieval Jewish Polemics," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 45 (1978): 164-165.

very points of doctrine criticized by the Jewish father in the story. With this in mind, one must be open to the possibility that the characterizations in the story could at least in part be the response of the poem's Christian author to real-world polemical attacks leveled by Jews.

But before moving onto the work of Joesph Kimhi and the possible influence of his writing on depictions of Jews in *Das Jüdel*, it is prudent to consider one of his own influences: the above-mentioned *Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*. The Nestor's purpose, according to Joel Rembaum was to "point out the unacceptability of the belief in Jesus' divinity especially when that notion is compared with the concepts associated with the God of Israel."<sup>181</sup> Rembaum asserts that because many high medieval polemics draw on different Nestor material, they were either influenced by the text itself or through various derivative works carrying its arguments that were in heavy circulation among later Jewish polemicists.<sup>182</sup> While the mere existence of actual Jewish anti-Christian polemics does not necessarily mean that the author of *Das Jüdel* was familiar with or influenced by such arguments, the Jewish father's strikingly pointed attack on the Christ-child's vulnerability is consistent with Jewish critiques circulating at the time. In fact, some of these arguments had even appeared in a Christian work, Gilbert Crispin's *Disputation of a Jew with a Christian about the Christian Faith*, published before the first crusade.<sup>183</sup>

The *Disputation* featured arguments drawn from alleged conversations between Crispin and a Jewish friend. These disagreements, unlike those to follow, however, were presented in a respectful manner. In the discourses, the Jew questions negative Christian attitudes towards

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<sup>181</sup> Rembaum, "The Influence of Sefer Nestor," 158.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>183</sup> Gilbert Crispin, "Gilbert Crispin: Disputation of a Jew with a Christian about the Christian Faith (Before 1096)," *Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook*, accessed June 17, 2016, <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1196crispin-jews.asp>. Source text from St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Opera Omnia. Ad Fidem Codicum Recensuit Franciscus Salesius Schmitt.*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: F. Fromman, 1744) reprinted in Joseph Jacobs trans., *The Jews of Angevin England; Documents and Records, from the Latin and Hebrew Sources, Printed and Manuscript*, (New York, London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1893).

continued Jewish observance of the Law outlined in the Tanakh. Citing Psalm 118, the Jew claims that the Law stands unchanged and poses the query “Why was it said...For- ever O Lord, Thy word will remain in heaven (Ps. Cxviii. 89)?”<sup>184</sup> More central, however, the very divinity of Christ is called into question, “If there is no transmutation in God nor any shadow of change how could so great a change occur in Him that God could become man, the Creator a creature, and the incorruptible become maculate...”<sup>185</sup> Crispin’s argument, one that was common in the following decade, was that the Jewish interpretation of scripture was too literal and lacked the spiritual sophistication of a Christian interpretation.

The striking thing about Crispin’s work is that, whether or not the conversation actually took place, the debate is civil in both directions and the Jew is not made into a caricature. Crispin states “[the Jew’s] objections were consequent and logical, and as he explained with equal consequence his former objections, while our reply met his objections foot to foot and by his own confession seemed equally supported by the scriptures.”<sup>186</sup> If these types of respectful arguments continued to be typical into the twelfth century, the caricatures of Jews in the poem would stand as inconsistent with actual contemporary argument, divorced from any real-world context.

The question remains, then, whether increasingly hostile Jewish critique played a part in the development of increasingly hostile literary depictions of Jews. There has been some debate over at the exact time at which one can identify a perceptible and significant shift in Jewish/Christian relations but the general consensus seems to be in favor of a worsening, at the latest at some

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<sup>184</sup> Crispin, “Gilbert Crispin: Disputation of a Jew with a Christian about the Christian Faith (Before 1096).”

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

indefinite point in the thirteenth century.<sup>187</sup> For the characterizations of Jews in “*Das Jüdel*” to be considered the result of a worsening in relations and not just unrelated inventions of its author, placement of a negative shift by the late twelfth or early thirteenth century is required. Amos Funkenstein in his seminal article “Changes in the Patterns of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Twelfth Century” noted an “enhanced aggressiveness of western Christendom toward the Jews” during that century.<sup>188</sup> Some scholars, such as Jeremy Cohen have disagreed that Funkstein’s source material can be considered broadly representative of twelfth century polemics, or have argued that the new inclusion of direct responses to Jewish theological criticisms does not necessarily indicate a worsening in relations outside of the medium.<sup>189</sup> The disagreement to a point seems not to be over whether twelfth century Christian polemicists were indeed responding to a new kind of direct Jewish theological criticism but rather represents a qualitative disagreement over when these Christian responses reached a critical mass indicative of a paradigmatic shift. Funkstein suggested as much in his response to Cohen, contending that although a change is perceptible in the twelfth century literature, “the thirteenth century saw the practical consequences of the change.”<sup>190</sup> Cohen’s work that followed has supported the idea of a

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<sup>187</sup> For a detailed though slightly dated discussion of these debates which proved an invaluable entry point to the relevant historiography see Lasker, “Jewish-Christian Polemics at the Turning Point,” 161-164.

<sup>188</sup> Argument originally appearing in Hebrew summarized briefly in Robert Chazan, “Joseph Kimhi’s ‘Sefer Ha-Berit’: Pathbreaking Medieval Jewish Apologetics,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 85, no. 4 (1992): 418. Original article: Amos Funkenstein, “Changes in the Patterns of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the 12th Century,” *Zion* 33 (1968): 125–44.

<sup>189</sup> For Cohen’s criticisms see Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 21-32. David Berger has also questioned what an increase in Christian anti-Jewish polemical writing during the twelfth century indicates about the concerns of Christians during the period. He cautions that the existence of such literature could simply have been the result of “the overall cultural renaissance of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries” and that any real significant efforts to convert Jews must be attributed to the thirteenth century. Still, he acknowledges “The Christian assertions that Jews posed provocative questions with frequency and vehemence must be taken seriously. Christians were not confronting Jewish missionaries, but they faced a genuine, vigorous challenge from a proud and assertive Jewish community. See David Berger, “Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (June, 1986): 578-579.

<sup>190</sup> See note 66 In Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley u.a.: Univ. of California Press, 1993), 193.

“reclassification” and the creation of a “hermeneutical Jew” in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries but withholds judgment over the attribution of significance to one century or another.<sup>191</sup>

It is pertinent to acknowledge recent evaluations of medieval Christian/Jewish relations drawn from other mediums. Sara Lipton in her recent study of anti-Semitic iconography, identifies a negative shift in these relations as coming much later, in the fourteenth century, when there was a “polemical” use of Jewish caricature which shifted their role from witnesses to Christ’s truth in their servility, into anti-Christian aggressors. Her work is specifically focused on anti-Jewish iconography but also grapples briefly with the textual tradition. Lipton explicitly argues against the “traditional” placement of this shift in the thirteenth century by scholars such as Edward Fuchs and Thomas Bestul.<sup>192</sup> Lipton argues directly against Bestul’s identification of a growing social distance between Christians and Jews in the late thirteenth century, a conclusion at which Bestul arrived based on an analysis of changing rhetoric in James of Milan’s *Stimulus Amoris*.<sup>193</sup> Lipton argues that relations could not have been significantly negative since many Jewish Communities were prospering in the late twelfth century. Occasional outbursts of violence such as the massacres of Rhineland Jews during the first crusade (1096) or the more recent attacks on Jews in 1146, she contends, were not indicative of general attitudes. Her argument at its core seems to suggest that Jewish economic and social prosperity in the twelfth century preclude a growth in social distance and hostility.<sup>194</sup> This argument is unconvincing and seems inconsistent

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<sup>191</sup> “...I shall not now offer any general interpretation of medieval anti-Judaism, nor shall I claim the relative importance of one century over another in the annals of its development.” in Jeremy Cohen, “The Muslim Connection,” *Witness to Witchcraft*, 145.

<sup>192</sup> Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography*, 1st edition (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014), 174.

<sup>193</sup> Lipton cites comments on Bestul’s argument in Lipton, *Dark Mirror*, 111. Bestul’s original argument can be found in Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 79-90.

<sup>194</sup> Lipton argues that in the fourteenth century, normal balances of status and power were perturbed as a growing merchant class began to displace the nobility in influence and wealth, so that wealth, not just lineage became the

with her suggestion that similar economic disparities in the fourteenth century worsened Jewish/Christian relations. Lipton argues that normal balances of status and power were perturbed as a growing merchant class began to displace the nobility in influence and wealth so that lineage no longer was the only marker of status. Jews, she argues, due to their role in moneylending and commerce also rose in status, disrupted this order, and in so doing fostered contempt. But it still seems more likely that the shifts toward increasingly negative representations in stories like the Jewish Boy, and the subsequent growth of the libel are part of a snowballing of antipathy, the roots of which are discernable at a much earlier date than Lipton identifies.

Still, Lipton is wise to suggest that there is more to the picture of Jewish persecution than the Crusades. A reductionist approach which identifies any one factor as a singular cause of complex, but generally worsening relations would be unwise and a number of scholars have looked to other economic, polemical, and legal changes to explain overarching trends. Still, when it comes to the shift between Christian conceptions of Jews as a crooked but redeemable people to one willfully and aggressively hostile to Christianity (at least as is recognizable in a changing narrative tradition), the impact of the Crusades can explain much. David Lasker pointed out that the twelfth century “Christian renaissance” created an optimism in Christendom as “all non-Christian or non-orthodox Christian groups were rooted out (except for the Muslim presence in Iberia)” leaving only the Jews as holdouts against *consensus omnium*.<sup>195</sup> This statement is slightly misleading as heretical thought could never have been completely suppressed and is openly identifiable in northern Germany and France by the turn of the

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new marker of status. Jews, via their role in moneylending and commerce in turn also rose in status, disrupting the old order and fostering contempt. Lipton, *Dark Mirror*, 111.

<sup>195</sup> Daniel J. Lasker, “The Impact of the Crusades on the Jewish-Christian Debate,” *Jewish History* 13, no. 2 (1999): 26.



thirteenth century.<sup>196</sup> Still, a perception of Muslim aggression and a realization in the thirteenth century that Christianity did not rule a major part of the world, challenged a sense of Christian hegemony. Both Lasker and others have looked to this challenge of earthly authority as a possible cause for increased negative attitudes toward Jews. Lasker interestingly pointed out that thirteenth-century Jews were aware of (or contributed to) this challenge to the Christian worldview and even used the ongoing fighting between Muslims and Christians to argue that Jesus did not bring the peace promised of the Messiah.<sup>197</sup>

While Lasker refrained from quantifying the impact of the Crusades on Jewish/Christian relations, Jeremy Cohen more assertively has argued that a Christian “reclassification” of Jews happened in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as a result of the Crusades and increased contact between Christians and Muslims. He argued that both Jews and Muslims came to be conflated in the category of *infidels* and *infidelitas*, a conflation manifested by the appearance of the two groups in tandem within twelfth and especially thirteenth century canon law.<sup>198</sup> One would expect such a reclassification and the associated Christian fear of a loss of hegemony to have had some impact on attitudes to and representations of Jews. At the very least, this state of affairs could have heightened Christian sensitivity to Jewish criticisms.

While a consensus over the exact placement of a discernible increase in Jewish/Christian hostility may remain elusive, conservatively it can be suggested that at the very least, by the time of *Das Jüdel’s* composition, strong Jewish criticisms of Christianity were making inroads in

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<sup>196</sup> David Berger, “Christian Heresy and Jewish Polemic in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 68, no. 3(1975): 293.

<sup>197</sup> “A central Jewish argument against the possibility that Jesus was the messiah is the fact that the promises of world peace have not yet been fulfilled. While not necessarily referring to the Crusades, since Christians were quite capable of fighting against each other and did not need a Muslim enemy to provoke belligerency, undoubtedly the constant calls for Holy War in the context of the Crusades had an impact on the Jewish consciousness of the lack of peace.” Daniel J. Lasker, “The Impact of the Crusades on the Jewish-Christian Debate,” *Jewish History* 13, no. 2 (1999): 30.

<sup>198</sup> Jeremy Cohen, “The Muslim Connection,” in Cohen, *From Witness to Witchcraft*, 143-146.

western Europe and some Christian authors were aware of these criticisms. But the importance of these criticisms lies not in their mere existence but in their *form*. It is again appropriate to recall Despres's argument that in the minds of thirteenth and fourteenth century Christians, the Eucharist and the image of the suffering Christ child were intimately associated and that these associations in turn naturally lent themselves to "images of host persecution, ritual murder, and transubstantiation."<sup>199</sup> *Das Jüdel* is a model example of a source featuring every symbol in that particular cluster but as will be argued below, Jewish polemical writings that aggressively and sometimes crudely mocked both the Christ child and the Virgin Mary were not responsible for but likely contributed to the creation of hostile caricatures.

By the last quarter of the twelfth century, a new kind of Jewish anti-Christian polemical school rooted in a shared pool of arguments had appeared.<sup>200</sup> That two separate sources dated around 1170, one by Jacob b. Reuben and the other by Joseph Kimhi both show strong signs of influence from another text, the *Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer* supports this notion. In addition, these "standard" arguments come out of the mouth of the Jewish father in "*Das Jüdel*." The Christian-authored poem, however, inverts these standard criticisms by framing Christ's humility as noble and an argument *for* his divinity. For despite the apparent breaking apart of the Host, it is the self-humbling intentional sacrifice that is proven triumphant. That negative characterizations in the poem were influenced by the author's awareness of these sorts of contemporary debates is likely as both Latin and Hebrew source material bear witness to the fact that such debates were not an uncommon occurrence.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Denise Despres, "Mary and the Eucharist," in Cohen, *From Witness to Witchcraft*, 391.

<sup>200</sup> Robert Chazan, "Joseph Kimhi's 'Sefer Ha-Berit': Pathbreaking Medieval Jewish Apologetics," *The Harvard Theological Review* 85, no. 4 (1992): 417.

<sup>201</sup> Joseph Kimhi, *The Book of the Covenant of Joseph Kimhi*, trans. Frank Talmage (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1972), 28.

But how can one be sure that the author of *Das Jüdel* was exposed to, aware of, or influenced by these sorts of debates? The answer is that we are unable to say for certain but the fact that most of the Jewish polemics against Christianity were based on similar arguments, increases the likelihood that the similarity of the Jewish Father's arguments was not a coincidence. For example, as Rembaum pointed out, the highly influential *Nestor* text forwarded many of the basic arguments used by its successors including an argument based on Isaiah 40:28 that claimed Jesus could not have been divine as he suffered on the cross.<sup>202</sup> The verse says that the creator does not faint and is not made weary.<sup>203</sup> This argument is in contrast to the seemingly vulnerable Christ presented in Matthew 27:46.<sup>204</sup>

Another text that followed in the tradition of *Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer* was Joseph Kimhi's *The Book of the Covenant* and parts of this work make the Jewish father's words, though not actions, seem comparatively tame. The work is presented as a dialogue between a Christian and Jew and was intended to arm Jews with scripturally-based arguments to counter those of Christians or Jewish converts to Christianity.<sup>205</sup> Kimhi was a refugee from the 1148 Almohade persecutions in Spain, ending up in Provence where "he functioned as teacher, translator, grammarian, and biblical exegete."<sup>206</sup> These activities brought him into discourse and debate with Christians of his time.<sup>207</sup> Kimhi picked up on the argument from Isaiah 40:28 stating, "Who

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<sup>202</sup> Rembaum relays that both the *Nestor*'s author and Joseph Kimhi makes this argument using "Isaiah 42, 28." This appears to be a typographical error. Kimhi cites Isaiah 40:28. In Rembaum, "The Influence of Sefer Nestor Hakomer," 171.

<sup>203</sup> Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding." [Isaiah 40:28] "*The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text : A New Translation : With the Aid of Previous Versions and with Constant Consultation of Jewish Authorities*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society). Accessed online at "The Tanakh," *Jewish Virtual Library*, 1917, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Bible/jpstoc.html>.

<sup>204</sup> "And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>205</sup> Kimhi, *The Book of the Covenant of Joseph Kimhi*, 19-20.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 16-17.

would dare to profess this belief [that God was made man] which diminished His greatness, whereby He cannot save His world except by humiliating Himself, debasing his majesty, and befouling His splendor.”<sup>208</sup> Kimhi carried his specific critique of Jesus’s humiliation and degradation to its highest scathing pitch with his critique of the Virgin Mary and the Christ-child. The criticism called upon Exodus to argue that Jesus was not divine, as scripture tells that humans could not see God in the flesh and live to tell the tale.

Who said, *For man may not see Me and live* (Exod. 33:20) – how shall I believe that this great inaccessible *Deus absconditus* needlessly entered the womb of a woman, the filthy, foul bowels of a female, compelling the living God to be born of a woman, a child without knowledge or understanding, senseless, unable to distinguish between his right hand and his left, defecating and urinating, sucking his mother’s breasts from hunger and thirst, crying when he is thirsty so that his mother will have compassion on him. Indeed, if she had not suckled him, he would have died from hunger like other people.<sup>209</sup>

The statement above in short order throws out the possibility of the corporeality of divinity while denigrating God’s pure virgin vessel as filthy and depicting the Christ-child not as beautiful but as “defecating and urinating.” The story of the Jewish boy seeks to prove that the opposite is true by depicting the challenged Christian dogma as triumphant against the criticisms of its Jewish antagonists.

*Das Jüdel* weaves a sharp dichotomy between a Jewish Law, represented by a near-obsession with virility, and the gentle compassion of Mary, the innocence of a child—be it the Jewish boy or Christ, and a willing faith coming from the heart. The Jewish boy’s behavior takes on an almost saintly character, making the father’s attempted murder of the child in a hot oven all the more emotionally potent. As noted earlier, at the beginning of the story, the boy attempts to follow the religion of his fathers by avoiding all participation in Christianity, even as he is drawn to it. After his father begins to lecture him, he likewise comments that he has not forgotten the

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 36-37.

law and indicates he is trying to do the right thing.<sup>210</sup> The implication is that the child realizes that Christianity is the fulfillment of this law. The father in his continued failure to acknowledge the truth discovered by his child represents a stereotypical stubborn Jewish ignorance in contrast to the child's innocent openness to the truth. When he realizes that the boy is fully unwilling to follow Jewish Law, and sees that his son is fully in league with the Christians, he sadly concludes that he must kill the boy, and asks the boy himself to get him a knife with which to do so!<sup>211</sup>

The curious thing is that the father in this version of the story does not kill the child out of anger but out of his attempt to be merciful:

He spoke "It is better for me if I kill you myself lest I send my child to this unusual misery. I will do this to him, I want to stab him to death myself. So, this I must [do] lest [it be] done to my child at the discretion of another. God knows I have not broken [his commandments]. The Jews overcame the unfortunate, sufferable, burden [of Christ?].<sup>212</sup>...The Jews know that [Christ] died pitifully."<sup>213</sup>

The Jews interestingly are not depicted as bloodthirsty in the story as they would come to be in host desecration and ritual murder libels or even later variations of the tale. But still they remain bound to their laws and these laws call them to forcefully and brutally oppose Christianity. Insofar as blood libel archetypes are concerned, the sequence of events that follows features two motifs that are central to ritual murder libels: a slavish devotion to supposed Jewish belief and ritual as well as a willingness to inflict child harm.

Following the debate and the father's request for a knife, other Jews enter the scene and take council together. They conclude that they have no other choice but to follow the law seemingly

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<sup>210</sup> [Line 208] in Sprenger, "Judenknaben," 132.

<sup>211</sup> "He asked him to give him a weapon, a sword or a knife." "er bat im ein wâfen geben, ein swert ode rein mezzet." [Lines 242-243] in Ibid, 133.

<sup>212</sup> "er sprach 'mir ist bezzer daz ich mir selbe tuo den tôten denne ich dise ungewonlîch nôten an mînem kinde dise geschiht. Weiz got, ich entuon sîn niht.'" [Lines 244-253] in Sprenger, "Judenknaben," 133.

<sup>213</sup> "die juden verwizzen ime daz; er taet unmenliche." [Lines 264-265] in "Judenknaben," 133.

in order to reclaim a sense of agency, even masculinity. “Now we see completely that [because we acted] improperly by him [Christ], the manly Jews have since then been made effeminate.”<sup>214</sup> This statement, so strongly in opposition to the feminine or vulnerable creates a sharp contrast to the loving mercy of the Virgin Mary emphasized at the beginning of the poem as well as the childlike innocence and faith of the Jewish boy. The Jewish father can be seen as a caricature of real criticisms in contemporary Jewish polemics against Christianity. Recall how in Joseph Kimhi’s *Book of the Covenant*, the Virgin Mary is devalued as a suitable vessel for God with her womb described as “the filthy, foul bowels of a female” and the Christ child described as “without knowledge or understanding, senseless.”<sup>215</sup> The story counters these criticisms by making the Virgin Mary, the innocent Child, and ultimately the Christian faith, victorious.

After the child asks why one would pray to the kind of God who asked for such terrible things, the father responds, “It is not prayer, it is Law. Now forgive me [his death] through God. I am very strongly enslaved to the commandments on the Law.”<sup>216</sup> Following this, the child is bound and thrown into the oven. Far from relishing the torturous death as they do in later libels, the Jews flee the room so as not to see the boy suffer.<sup>217</sup> After the violence, the father is filled with remorse “The resolve of the father thereupon became completely helpless as [the boy] was slain. His hands [were] wringing and he [was] lamenting and wept about the earlier confrontation until it was nearly time for evening prayer.”<sup>218</sup>

It seems clear that the motivation to kill the boy was to remain in accordance with the Law. However the acknowledgement that the Jews had been punished for killing Christ could suggest

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<sup>214</sup> “nû sehe wir wol daz sich verkêret hât iuwer menlîch muot ze wîbîn siten.” [Lines 268-269] in Ibid, 133.

<sup>215</sup> Kimhi, *The Book of the Covenant*, 37.

<sup>216</sup> “ez ist niht bete, ez ist gebot. nû erlât mich sîn durch got. Ich hân vil starke knechte: den gebietet bî dem rehte...” [Lines 277-279] in Sprenger, “Judenknaben,” 133.

<sup>217</sup> [Lines 286-288] in Ibid, 133.

<sup>218</sup> [Lines 326-330] in Ibid, 134.

that the Jewish boy was killed as an attempted repayment for the debt of killing Christ. That would be consistent with blood libel beliefs that Jews required Christian blood because of their degraded state earned as punishment for killing Christ. But, as mentioned earlier, this could also just be the Christian author's misrepresentation of Jewish ritual and the disposal of *chemetz* as the boy, for no longer being Jewish, had to be disposed of. This would be supported by the lines discussing the Jews gathering for an evening festival meal, i.e. Passover/Pesach. "[The father] wept about the earlier confrontation until it was nearly late evening whereupon one then feasted in the city. There [the boy] waited mightily and the Jews gathered there [who] had seen the child abused [to see] whether he was burned."<sup>219</sup> Though certainly not definite, checking to see if the *chemetz* was burned before eating the prescribed Passover meal seems consistent with a Christian embellishment of Jewish practice. In either event, that the Jews killed the child due to an adherence to the law is clear.

Preceding the feast, the Jews gather together. As the Jews approach, the boy emerges having been completely preserved from the flames. Like Christ and the Eucharist, the boy with the help of God has emerged victorious after an almost sure and miserable fate. His father in shock asks if it is really his son. The boy confirms, "I myself argued the truth. [I am the one] that in your misery [you] killed in fire."<sup>220</sup> The Jews are overjoyed at this miracle and the father asks the boy how it was done. "He said 'Son, who has preserved you from the furious fire?'" to which the boy replied "The servant pure and the servant beautiful. [The] mother of the one who resides with God."<sup>221</sup> This sequence of events is enough to finally prove to the Jews the power of the Christian religion and the story ends on a positive note with their conversion to Christianity. It is

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<sup>219</sup> [Lines 329-335] in Ibid, 134.

<sup>220</sup> [Line 350] in Sprenger, "Judenknaben," 134.

<sup>221</sup> [Lines 354-357] in Ibid, 134.

true that the story of the “Jewish boy” in the iteration considered depicts Jews much more sympathetically than they would be in the following centuries. Still, even at this early point, we see the development of a depiction of the Jew as directly in contrast to Christianity and embodying the inverse of all of the positive attributes of the latter.

A silver lining exists in *Das Jüdel* that cannot be found in ritual murder, host desecration, or blood libel stories or charges: no one dies and the Jews are spared torture and execution. The story, after all, is not the ritual murder libel but rather was the result of or contributor to the formation of the symbol clusters that supported it. And while the Christian author’s responsibility should not be understated, it stands to reason in light of the circumstantial but abundant evidence that actual Jewish critique of the Christ child likely contributed to the maintenance and development of symbolic associations between Jews, child harm, and contempt for the Eucharist that worked together to support ritual murder and host desecration libels. These new associations, as we will see in the next chapter, were the basis from which the ritual murder libel changed radically to a new form.



### **CHAPTER III**

#### **From Ritual Murder to Blood Libel: The Early Modern Shift in Emphasis in Anti-Semitic Libels from Crucifixion to Blood Motifs**

A full study of the evolution and expression of the ritual murder, host desecration, and blood libels could easily fill a weighty monograph while only scratching the surface of the phenomenon. What has preceded and what we will now bring to a tentative conclusion is an examination of religious and social underpinnings of the charges over time. The first chapter showed how the ritual murder charges served to assuage religious and social tensions by creating a scapegoat in the Jew who in his or her contempt for Christianity, verified its validity. While individual charges ultimately could have been the result of petty economic motivations or local quarrels, the rather implausible claims of Jewish ritual murder of which people took advantage still relied on a parent society ready to believe the charges. One factor that made the society ready to accept the initially implausible was the fact that religious doubt could be externalized and crystallized into a Jewish villain on whose head justice could be meted and Christianity reaffirmed. As the nature of Christian religious doubts changed, as was observed in chapter one, the charges reflected that change. The crucifixion motifs of the early ritual murder charges characterized the Jew as a generalized enemy of Christianity. For ritual murder to become blood libel, however, the emphasis had to fixate more strongly on blood. Chapter II provided a window to this shift as ideas about the Jewish harm of children came to be associated with the Eucharist. The symbolic associations of the Jewish threat to the Christian body/Christ's Body and the ultimate victory of Christianity were picked up by stories of host desecration from the early

fourteenth century. Caroline Walker Bynum in her book *Wonderful Blood – Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* associated charges of Jewish host desecration and the resulting cults and shrines with the fourteenth and fifteenth century growth in what she calls “blood piety” in German-speaking lands.<sup>222</sup> While she and others have given comprehensive treatment to the host desecration charge and its Eucharistic imagery, additional focus on the later developments of the ritual murder charge is merited. As R. Po-chia Hsia has pointed out, the culmination of the ritual murder template drawing on motifs shared with the host desecration charge, “consolidated into a textual tradition between 1470 and 1540.”<sup>223</sup> This is to say that recurring characters, such as the Christian in too close intercourse with Jews or the conception that Jews required Christian blood for their rituals showed a great deal of consistency and internal logic. He adds that after this time, however, the template dissolved into a collection of “signs isolated from a larger field of meaning, vestiges of a discourse that had lost a part of its social audience.” It is around this 1470-1540 time frame to which we turn, then, in order to examine the final consolidation of the “symbol clusters” of the ritual murder charge and the creation of what truly can be called “blood libel.” That is to say, the myriad tropes forming the ritual murder and blood libel narratives were all present by this stage, including both crucifixion and blood motifs. After this point, while the libels did not disappear, “innovation,” waned. It is in the fifteenth and sixteenth century in in southern Germany, Switzerland and Northern Italy that a cultural and religious emphasis on blood combined with earlier tropes, ultimately resulting in an anti-semitic libel with blood squarely at its center. From the late fifteenth through the first half of the sixteenth centuries what had merely been ‘ritual murder’ had consolidated into blood libel.

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<sup>222</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>223</sup> R. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 128, 203-204.

Before delving into case studies from this period, one must first have a working knowledge of medieval blood beliefs, especially in the late middle ages, so as to understand why Jewish lust for Christian blood became central to Christian ideas about Jewish ritual murder. This requires a brief overview of its symbolic associations both at the 1470-1540 timeframe, and slightly earlier, to acknowledge that these associations did not develop out of a vacuum. Required for this task is a temporary suspension of the associations with blood that we ourselves carry. We must not, for example, rashly assume that blood in the narratives functioned as it does in a modern snuff film, merely emphasizing violence. That is not to say that depictions of blood were not used in this way. Gruesome dramatic effect, in fact, emphasized the brutality and villainy of Jews. Still, before the scientific revolution, blood was a potent life force in both an intensely religious and mystical sense as well as a sterile medical one.<sup>224</sup> Often, associations in each sphere of understanding blurred into the other.

To get a handle on these associations is no easy task, even more so when we approach our subjects from such a cultural and temporal divide. But it is quite possible to illuminate changing views and highlight increased focus on blood while understanding that the symbol of blood could have different meanings and be emphasized in different measure from one area to the next or even from person to person within one culture. One factor that simply cannot be ignored, however, is the correlation between the emphasis on blood in ritual murder charges and an increased religious focus on blood. While the affirmation of transubstantiation by Lateran IV in 1215 certainly increased focus on the eucharistic species and acknowledgment that it contained not merely metaphorical but literal blood, this acknowledgment developed into a reverence in

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<sup>224</sup> For blood in medieval medicine see Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*. For blood in medieval Christian mysticism, especially views of women see chapter 5, pp. 150-188, "Food in the Writings of Women Mystics" and chapter 8, pp. 245-251, "The Meaning of Food: Food as Physicality," in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

much of western Europe bordering on obsession.<sup>225</sup> A contributing factor was the removal of laity access to the chalice. This action was supported by an emphasis on two doctrines. The doctrine of concomitance held that both the body and blood of Christ are present in the Eucharistic bread alone, which allowed the clergy to withhold the eucharistic wine without robbing the laity of full reception. A second belief, that of “ocular communion,” held that the eucharist could be received without physical reception of any kind. The mere sight of the priest’s elevation beheld by the congregation was argued to suffice.<sup>226</sup>

Such an “occult” belief cannot but have increased the perceived mystical potency of that substance which was withheld. A true and honest belief in the miraculous power of blood fostered by these changes created a fertile foundation for “blood legends” like those of Jewish host desecration or ritual murder. The legends blended fact and fiction, blurring the lines between stories meant for religious instruction, *exempla*, and real-world charges. If, for example, the body of a young child was found, a faith in the wondrous properties of good Christian blood made it plausible to believe a witness who claimed the martyred corpse had bled when in the presence of Jews, signifying the guilt of Jewish murderers.<sup>227</sup> Additionally, a recent or especially localized example of the blood libel, commemorated in broadsheets or by the creation of a local shrine, made the libels plausible explanations for the shocking discovery of the corpse of a child

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<sup>225</sup> David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 84-87.

<sup>226</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 4-5.

<sup>227</sup> Proof miracles like that of a corpse bleeding when the murderer entered the vicinity of the victim could serve to verify claims backed by little evidence. This means of verification is especially susceptible to confirmation bias and rash conclusions. The *Edelsasser Chronik* (Strasburg, 1592) speaks of the 1270 ritual murder case of Heinrich Menger a seven-year-old boy. Local Jews were implicated because the child’s wounds miraculously bled afresh: “There is no investigation as to whether the wounds have been caused by mill-wheels, but the Jews are accused, because the wounds bleed afresh as soon as the corpse was carried into town.” This account seems much more consistent with blood libel cases in the late middle ages and for lack of an earlier source, could be the product of embellishment based on the later tradition. In Hermann Leberecht Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice: Human Blood and Jewish Ritual, an Historical and Sociological Inquiry*, trans. Henry Blanchamp (London: Cope & Fenwick, 1909), 183-184.

found in abused condition or a piece of eucharistic bread found with inexplicable speckles of reddish hue. This type of snowball effect goes far to explain the seemingly contagious nature of the libels, notwithstanding the economic grievances or other shared antipathies of Christians against Jews. Belief in such blood legends, Bynum points out, “occur in the later fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, regardless of whether an earlier historical event [provided] the kernel around which they were built.”<sup>228</sup>

A precondition for the belief in blood libel was the plausibility that Jews lusted after Christian blood. For this to be maintained, Christians had to have ascribed a high value to it. Of course, the belief that the eucharist was the real body of Christ, in itself, served to place immense significance on blood. But it is one thing to acknowledge the great importance of Christ’s blood and quite another to start ascribing immense curative properties to the Host outside of the context of communion. Of course ascribing curative powers to the Eucharist was not a late medieval innovation, but it was with the coming of a new blood piety that the balance between the Eucharist as a point of spiritual connection and a conception as spiritual instrument shifted in favor of the latter.

Perhaps no sphere of Christian thought more finely seeks to navigate the line between a conception of Christ’s blood as a spiritual salve and a tangible curative physical substance than Christian mysticism. Although our particular focus is on changing German conceptions on blood, a brief look at the mysticism of Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) helps to illustrate the subtle a subtle but significant shift toward more physical imagery in Christian discourses on blood that Bynum showed occurred during the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Catherine was a woman who scarcely penned a letter without poetic mention of Christ’s blood, particularly in descriptive,

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<sup>228</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 7.

visual, language.<sup>229</sup> Moreover, her letters represent not only the viewpoints of an isolated zealot but someone who spread her ideas to the very heart of the Christian institution, communicating frequently with the Papacy itself. Catherine's writings made liberal use of descriptive language, outlining her intense and personal visions of Christ's blood, and depicting it as a quite literal substance. Still, Catherine seemed to have had little concern for the physical body. So, "real" or not, Christ's blood served as a conduit towards salvation rather than a fortifying elixir for the present life. While her focus was spiritual, however, her imagery was material. She referred to the Blood of Christ, for example, as "the food of souls without which we cannot live in grace."<sup>230</sup> While her mystical focus resulted in a lack of concern for the physical wellbeing of her corporeal body and her descriptive imagery blurred the lines between the concrete and ethereal, her descriptions of blood were that of a concrete substance with a special efficacy. She describes the blood of Christ thusly:

Ah, sweet Blood, that dost raise the dead! **Thou givest life**, thou dost dissolve the shadows that darken the minds of reasonable creatures, and dost give us light! Sweet Blood, thou dost unite those who strive, thou dost clothe the naked, **thou dost feed** the hungry and give to drink to those who thirst for thee, and with the milk of thy sweetness **thou dost nourish** the little ones who have made themselves small by true humility, and innocent by true purity.<sup>231</sup>

Elsewhere, Catherine writes a letter of encouragement to Stefano Maconi and urges him to fight for the true church in the context of the Western Schism demanding "rouse thee from thy lukewarmness of heart; steep it in Blood" so that it will "be on fire to be all manful"<sup>232</sup> Her words refer to a spiritual or mental fortitude on the temporal plane but blood still is set as supporting

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<sup>229</sup> Catherine opens almost all of her letters with "I Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, write to you in His Precious Blood..." See Saint Catharine Benincasa of Sienna, *Saint Catherine of Siena as Seen in Her Letters*, trans., Vida D. Scudder, (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1905). Accessed online at <https://archive.org/details/SaintCatherineOfSienaAsSeenInHerLetters>.

<sup>230</sup> Catherine of Siena, *Letters*, 203.

<sup>231</sup> "To Brother Raimondo of Capua of the Order of the Preachers," in *Ibid*, 257. Emphasis mine.

<sup>232</sup> "To Stefano Maconi," *Ibid*, 301.

very physical action. Elsewhere, however, she does seem to ascribe to Christ's blood with explicit efficacy on the physical body, saying of it that "This is the blood that warms, that drives out all chill, clears the voice of the one who drinks it, and gladdens the heart and soul."<sup>233</sup>

Catherine's views on Christ's blood and its relationship to baptismal water also highlight a discourse between Jews and Christians with direct bearing on the libel. In a letter to Queen Giovanna of Naples, one catches a glimpse at blood's preeminent potency in Catherine's particular type of Christian piety. In the letter she refers to the rite of baptism as "crimson with the Blood of Christ."<sup>234</sup> Baptismal water, whether visible as blood or not, is elevated in potency by it. This was not merely an innovation of Catherine's either. David Biale has pointed out that there was a great mass of written discourse in the high and late middle ages both by Christians and Jews that considered the relative religious efficacy of blood or water; baptism or circumcision.<sup>235</sup> One such text was a thirteenth-century Jewish polemic, the *Sefer Nizzahon Washan* which argued that the blood of circumcision was more powerful than that of baptismal water.<sup>236</sup> One recalls Israel Yuval's controversial thesis grounded in the idea that the Christian belief in Jewish blood libel stemmed from a misunderstanding of authentic Jewish symbolism and practice. The resulting association of Jews with murder and death additionally was supported by their refusal to adopt life-giving baptism demanded by crusaders, choosing instead to invert "proper" baptism by dying as martyrs near rivers, the very place associated with the rite. This, coupled with communal suicides as happened in Mainz, where Jews killed both themselves and their children in order to spare them from the fate of apostasy, fed the construction.<sup>237</sup> Yuval

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<sup>233</sup> Biale, *Blood and Belief*, 87.

<sup>234</sup> Catherine of Siena, *Letters*, 317.

<sup>235</sup> Biale, *Blood and Belief*, 93-100.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>237</sup> The self-martyrdom of the Jews of Mainz in 1096 as relayed in Jewish sources of the following generation are examined in Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of

argued that this created in the minds of Christian contemporaries the perception that Jews were a people who stubbornly worshipped blood and death rather than Christian water and life.<sup>238</sup>

Baptism, these Christians perceived, had been perverted by Jews from a positive, cleansing force of water to a shockingly negative one based in blood.

While it seems reasonable that a Christian awareness of this extreme means to avoid baptism contributed to the idea of ritual murder by forging an association between Jews and the murder of children, Yuval's argument that Christians developed the idea of Jewish blood lust from a strict dichotomy between a Christian preference for baptismal water vs a Jewish preference for the blood of circumcision or death is unconvincing. The blood libel, to put it simply does not seem to be a case of "water vs blood," but rather one of "blood vs blood." In short, it is a debate over which religion's approach to blood drew more benefit from God. This alternate perspective is supported by the writing of Rupert of Deutz (part of present Cologne), a contemporary to the Jewish massacres of 1096. Deutz championed the power of blood in his gloss on Exodus 24 wherein Moses is seen sprinkling blood on his people as a sign of the covenant with God.<sup>239</sup> Rupert argues that "Without the sprinkling of blood, no one will see God."<sup>240</sup> The blood in this case, however is not the blood of the Old Testament but the new and more effective blood of Christ's New Testament sacrifice.

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California Press, 2008), 144-161. Yuval in a footnote on pp. 144 notes that Jeremy Cohen has suggested the source material should be read as satire in "Persecutions of 1096—from Martyrdom to Martyrology: the Sociocultural Context of the Hebrew Crusade Chronicles" [in Hebrew], *Zion* 59 (1994): 185-95. Yuval disagrees.

<sup>238</sup> "Thus, the Jews could tell about killing and martyrdom that took place specifically on the river. In Christian public opinion, these same facts were given the opposite interpretation: the murderousness of the Jews is connected with rivers, because they desire blood instead of water (i.e., baptism), death rather than salvation. The Jews, it was believed, wanted to turn the water into blood—a clear allusion to the plague of blood in Egypt—for 'that which was in the beginning shall be at the end.' Moreover, in the accusation that Jews required Christian blood in order to bake matzot—an accusation that became explicit only in the later ritual murder libels—we find an implicit assumption that, instead of water, the Jews use blood on Passover." In Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 179.

<sup>239</sup> "Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'" Exodus 24:8, (NRSV).

<sup>240</sup> Biale, *Blood and Belief*, 86.



It is clear, regardless of one's interpretation of these blood beliefs, however, that blood was viewed as a substance with special efficacy. In the cases explored above, this efficacy was primarily spiritual while only on occasion was it hinted at blood's beneficial impact on the body. This type of general reverence for eucharistic blood does much to explain why Christians believed the literal body of Christ in the form of the Host would bleed when stabbed by Jews. The bleeding demonstrated Christ's immanence. In the same way it explained why the day's old body of an innocent Christian child allegedly abused by Jews similarly bled miraculously to show God's power. One still is left wondering, however, why Christians believed Jews purposefully sought to cannibalize the blood of Christian children. What motivation could possibly underlie such an act and what benefits could it confer? To understand this, one must delve deeper into medieval beliefs about blood. Blood, Eucharistic or otherwise, for medieval Christians was the source of life, or in the case of "bad blood," the source of sickness. Eucharistic blood can be seen as the highest manifestation of good blood on this spectrum. What is important to understand here is that the miracle of the Eucharist came to be no mere abstract symbolic gesture but *real* blood in the late middle ages, albeit of divine origin. It not only bound the Christian community together through their shared ritual consumption but also purified the blood of the Christian communicant.

As others have noted, reverence for this powerful substance evolved to the point of near obsession in Northern Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, especially in German areas.<sup>241</sup> As access to the chalice was taken away from the laity in the thirteenth century, desire for its contents only grew. The faithful responded by fulfilling their desire for Christ's blood via mystical visions or by visiting shrines of bloodied Hosts, allegedly attacked by the Jews. In

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<sup>241</sup> Charles Zika, "Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages: Controlling the Sacred in Fifteenth-Century Germany," *Past & Present*, no. 118 (1988): 25–64. Also Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*.

Bynum's words, "withdrawal of the cup only increased the people's sense of its power. Desire kept pace with—and circumvented—prohibition."<sup>242</sup> Some, in their newfound devotion to eucharistic blood, even attempted to visit several church services in one day to see the eucharistic chalice elevated by a priest and in so doing receive this ocular communion again.<sup>243</sup> Mystical visions which earlier had featured the liquids "water, honey, and milk" in association "even of wounds and hearts" in the fourteenth and fifteenth century were replaced by blood "ever more copiously pooled or shed."<sup>244</sup> This sort of visual obsession with blood found expression not only in mysticism but in the blood libel itself. *Das Endiger Judenspiel*, a play based on a late fifteenth-century blood libel in the Swiss town of Endigen, for instance, makes liberal use of a visual focus on blood, utilizing imagery of blood as pooled on the floor or, statements like that of one Jewish character that "[Blood] should run like a fountain."<sup>245</sup>

This merger of divine essence and physical substance made the association with good blood and the health of the body and soul markedly stronger. While medieval knowledge about the body was not standardized in the modern sense, the medical information of the day, drawing on the Hippocratic and Galenic traditions among others, held the sickness or health of a person to be dependent on the state of one's blood. These traditions directly influenced the German-speaking areas under present consideration. Bettina Bildhauer identifies the *Bartholomäus* as "the most widely used German medical handbook in the thirteenth century."<sup>246</sup> The book claimed to consolidate information drawn from the works of Hippocrates, Galen, and Constantinus Africanus. Every disease discussed within the text was directly connected to a problem with the

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<sup>242</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 94.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>245</sup> Nichts bessers khundt erfunden warden, dan christien bluet auff diser erden vergiessen, wie dan unser eltern dasselbig thon and ihre vettern." Lines 219-224. "und solt es lauffen wie die brunen" Line 306. Karl von Amira, *Das Endinger Judenspiel* (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1883), 29.

<sup>246</sup> Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, 22.

blood, because health and sickness were contingent on the four liquid humours all contained in various measure therein.<sup>247</sup> Health depended both on maintaining a balance of these humours in proper proportion and in turn their relation to the body's conditional state as hot/cold and wet/dry. It was blood, however that was seen as the most important of the humours as it contained all of the others. The *Bartholomäus*, in fact, does not even give the other humours their own names but refers to them “instead as ‘blood turned black’, ‘blood foam’ and ‘excess blood’.”<sup>248</sup>

A focus on blood remained consistent in the German medical discourse, even after the *Bartholomäus* fell from use. The *Arzneibuch* by Ortolf von Baierland displaced the *Bartholomäus* in use from the fourteenth century, and offered a more systematic approach to each disease but maintained a prime focus on properly balanced or “good” blood. The medical treatise was likely written in Würzburg, northern Bavaria, a region notable for its number of blood libel cases from the late fifteenth century forward.<sup>249</sup> In the *Arzneibuch*, the first step in diagnosis was to determine if the sickness was caused by a problem with blood. The physician was urged to examine the color of urine to see if it was red and to pay attention to the pulsing of the veins.<sup>250</sup> The book is notable both for its strong emphasis on achieving a proper state of blood, including a three-part treatise on bloodletting in chapter 73 replete with illustrations. It is also notable for its reception, serving as a standard text in the German-speaking world into the early modern period.<sup>251</sup> One can see a primacy of blood, then, in the learned medical beliefs of the very region that also witnessed an increased focus on blood in other areas.

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<sup>247</sup> The four humours: “blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow (or red) bile” in Ibid, 24.

<sup>248</sup> Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, 24.

<sup>249</sup> Ortrun Riha, “Arzneibuch Des Ortolf von Baierland,” *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*, accessed July 4, 2016, [https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Arzneibuch\\_des\\_Ortolf\\_von\\_Baierland](https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Arzneibuch_des_Ortolf_von_Baierland).

<sup>250</sup> Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, 25.

<sup>251</sup> Riha, “Arzneibuch Des Ortolf von Baierland”.

But what is the connection to the blood libel? It is true that the *Arzneibuch* focused on getting “bad” substance out of the body through bloodletting but it also included the intake of specific foods in order to strengthen the blood. Food, after all, from this particular medical perspective was directly converted into blood. Theological and medical opinions on the exact composition of blood and how food was integrated into it had for some time been the subject of debate. Did food integrate into the body or was it simply passed? Peter Lombard centuries earlier had argued in his *Sentences* (1154-57) that all human flesh came from Adam and had multiplied of itself without the need for matter from without. He cited Jesus’s ability to multiply a few loaves of bread to feed many as evidence for this view.<sup>252</sup> Additionally, the literal consumption of the material body of Christ became unacceptable to many as a Christ that could be consumed as food could also be expelled as excrement. The general solution was an appeal to older natural philosophy and medical belief that held that the “denser and more corruptible components” are expelled while what is useful for the body is integrated.<sup>253</sup> The general conclusion, however, was that at the very least, the beneficial parts of that consumed are integrated rather than expelled. Christ’s blood, being of divine substance, would be wholly beneficial and integrated.

This problem resolved, the stage was set for the belief that the consumption of either Christ’s blood or the fortified blood of communicant Christians, already strengthened by the former, could be seen as medically advantageous. Some physicians certainly saw the eucharist itself as a medical cure. As Piero Camporesi has pointed out, commenting in this case on later Italian medical philosophy, “the Eucharistic manna was called—‘remedy for eternal death and viaticum

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<sup>252</sup> Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Food and the Body: Some Peculiar Questions in High Medieval Theology* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999), 1-2.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

for Paradise'<sup>254</sup>...the 'bread of life' (T. Camponella) [and] was universally felt to be the...protection and health for the soul and body, and remedy for all spiritual and bodily evil...medicine for corporeal and spiritual ills alike."<sup>255</sup> In short, then, that Jews would seek Christian blood as a cure for their ailments was not a wholly radical idea. Because, however, Jews lacked access to the sacrament, they could gain this cure only through nefarious means, and this led to Christian concern over its possible abuse.

The Jewish need for Christ's or Christians' blood still does not explain why Jews were depicted as specifically killing Christian children. Several possible explanations for this can be provided. As we saw in the last chapter, a narrative tradition helped to develop the association between Jews and the ritual murder of children. Additionally, as Yuval has pointed out, the murders of Jewish children by their parents supported associations between Judaism and child murder.<sup>256</sup> Those indeed likely are contributing factors. But it cannot be ignored that Christian children were the focus of blood libels rather than murdered adults. This was due to beliefs about the particular qualities of their blood. Blood as we have seen was not merely a powerful religious symbol but, in a medieval medical worldview, a potent substance. This substance, however, could either be powerful and pure or corrupt and weak. Central to medieval views on blood were the concepts of "wet" and "dry," qualities which ran the body in some medieval medical thought. The fifteenth century Florentine scholar Marsilio Ficino for example believed that "ageing and death arose from the absorption of [bodily] moisture by [bodily] heat [and additionally that] excessive humidity was...dangerous, causing corruption of the blood and putrefaction of the

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<sup>254</sup> "*Antidotum mortis, pharmacum immortalitatis*" in Piero Camporesi, *Juice of Life: The Symbolic and Magic Significance of Blood*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Continuum Intl Pub Group, 1996), 61.

<sup>255</sup> "*Tutamen et salus animae et corporis*" in Camporesi, 61.

<sup>256</sup> Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 161-163.

flesh.”<sup>257</sup> Children’s blood, which had been subject to less temporal decay and natural corruption, was to both many physicians and laymen alike quite literally liquid life.

Jews, however, did not just need blood for medical purposes like any Christian but had a greater urgency to acquire it for a host of ailments and abnormalities associated with their “race.” In addition, their alleged need for blood spanned both these medical requirements and ran into religious ones. Francesca Mattaoni has summarized some of these alleged infirmities:

Jews were believed to employ Christian blood [from children] during the rite of circumcision, and also at Passover when they used it in mixing the wine and baking the unleavened bread. They were also said to need it to, allegedly, make aphrodisiacs and magical potions; to prevent or cure epilepsy; to paint the bodies of the dead; to cover the *foetor Judaicus*- the stench that connotated them; to ease labour pains; to cure haemorrhoids; to redden their typical pallor; to heal skin diseases, sores, and scrofula; to cure the blindness that was said to afflict all Jews at birth; to make children fertile; to remove the monstrous parts that distinguished Jewish infants, such as two small fingers, so similar to the Devil’s horns, attached to their foreheads; and to stop haemorrhages [sic] and the copious menstruation that affected both Jewish women and men.<sup>258</sup>

The last stereotype of the excessive menstruation of both male and female Jews is closely connected to the idea of their bodies being infirm and corrupt.<sup>259</sup> According to Galenic medical thought, women menstruated because unlike men, their bodies were not efficient at utilizing blood’s “life-force” and was therefore simply discharged and wasted. To achieve health, the balance of good and bad blood aspired to in *Bartholomäus* and *Arzneibuch* had to be achieved through intervention. This intervention, the blood libel would suppose, was sought through the consumption of the blood of Christian children.

A sort of double standard was employed on the use of blood depending on who possessed the substance. Christ’s blood in the hands of a proper priest was an exceptional source of power for

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<sup>257</sup> Francesca Matteoni, “The Jew, the Blood and the Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” *Folklore* 119, no. 2 (August 2008): 191.

<sup>258</sup> Matteoni, “The Jew, the Blood and the Body,” 190-191.

<sup>259</sup> See also, Irvn M. Resnick, “Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 3 (2000): 241–63.

good. In the hands of a Jew, however, it could be used for evil. It is with depictions of Jewish usage of blood that its efficacy shifts from the known “medical,” based in a framework of natural philosophy, to the strictly “magical.”<sup>260</sup> While the Christian priest administered Christ’s blood through a proper ceremony and for the benefit of Christians, Jews were thought to use the eucharist and the blood of Christians for their own nefarious ritual and magical purposes. This could breed Christian anxiety. Miri Rubin examined blood’s feature in the fourteenth-century *Chronicle of St. Denis* which sheds light on a liminal stage before the Blood Libel reached dominance. The story bridges the basic trope of Jewish well poisoning as the intentional cause of plague with fears of Jewish abuse of the power of the eucharist and Christian blood. In the tale, Jews make a poison which now included “herbs, human urine, blood, and the eucharist.”<sup>261</sup> In *St. Denis*, as in the early ritual murder or host desecration charges, the Jews take advantage of the power of blood to harm Christ or Christians. In the blood libel, Jews harm Christians in order to benefit themselves.

In many ways, anxieties over Jewish access to the power of blood reflected internal disputes over the control of blood within the Church itself. The clergy had always had access and authority over the administration of the eucharist and, as we have seen, with the coming of concomitance and ocular communion, the communicant was moved away from what little access they previously had. A sort of democratization of direct access to Christ’s blood followed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. No longer physically in possession of the Eucharist, many Christians, as we have seen with the case of Catherine of Siena and her particular brand of mysticism, shifted their piety to the visual sphere.<sup>262</sup> The experience of Christ’s blood shifted to a

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<sup>260</sup> For more on the Christian stereotype of the Jewish magician/sorcerer see “Part Two: The Jew As Sorcerer” in Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 57-140.

<sup>261</sup> Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales : The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*, (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1999), 341.

<sup>262</sup> A succinct treatment of the development of ‘blood piety’ is presented in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 1-9.

more concrete visual medium in the form of shrines to miraculous blood. This blood could take the many forms. A shrine might have the blood of a saint on display in a vial or a bloodied Host, miraculously preserved from natural disaster or willful destruction by Jews. The trend flourished in fourteenth and fifteenth-century German lands where these sorts of relics became pilgrimage sites. No longer were pilgrimages based only on the death sites of local saints or on relics taken from the Holy Land such as pieces of the cross or the bones of saints.<sup>263</sup>

As Robert Barlett has pointed out, “The right to recognize sanctity enhanced the status and power of its possessor” and from its earliest days, the Church was focused on controlling this power.<sup>264</sup> This focus was transposed unchanged as blood relics and shrines replaced saintly veneration in some regions of Europe in the late middle ages. The most famous German example was the miraculous hosts of Wilsnack, which was a dominant pilgrimage site “from the 1380s to the mid-sixteenth century.”<sup>265</sup> It was to this site that many faithful flooded to see miraculous bloody Hosts that had been discovered by the priest Johannes Kabuz following a church fire in August 1383. The hosts were said to have been discovered with red spots of blood, demonstrating the living power of Christ as imminent on earth.<sup>266</sup>

What concerns us here are the reactions of theologians and what they tell us about the dynamics of power pertaining to our symbol. In the mid fifteenth century, Wilsnack was mired by controversy when the theologian Heinrich Tocke examined the Hosts and wrote a treatise against them, claiming, as Bynum quotes, that he “[saw] nothing red and [he had] never seen anything red” at Wilsnack. Such a statement denied the authenticity of the blood for it could not

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<sup>263</sup> Zika, “Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages,” 25-27.

<sup>264</sup> Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, Reprint edition (Princeton University Press, 2015), 602.

<sup>265</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 25.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, 25-26.



be the living and miraculous blood of Christ if not red, for living blood was red. Any non-miraculous blood once outside the body, of course, was subject to natural degradation and would dry to a brown crust. Tocke gained the support of the Archbishop of Madeburg, the University of Erfurt, and pope Eugene IV. The pilgrimage was not shut down but a newly consecrated Host was sent to serve alongside the bloody Host as a legitimate object of veneration.<sup>267</sup> While it certainly is possible, probable even, that Tocke's theological criticisms were genuinely felt, Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed out that the controversy of the Wilsnack relic can also be seen as a controversy of ecclesiastical over lay control although her concern centered primarily on the question, "why blood?" in an effort to explain why the controversy was over this *particular* relic.<sup>268</sup> That question aside, the idea that an attempt to discredit access to "blood" outside of the Eucharistic context of the Mass has a possible connection to dynamics of power is an interesting one. And in regard to the blood libel specifically, how much more threatening, then, would it be to consider that the Jews would try to gain access to and control over this power? The Jews in the blood libel charge, more so than the ritual murder antecedent, are doubly villainous for seeking not only to profane the body of Christ but to possess it.

### **Blood Replaces Crucifixion as the Dominant Ritual Murder Motif**

With a recognition of blood's growing centrality as both a powerful religious symbol and substance as well as an understanding of efforts to properly control access, the contextual backdrop from which to understand the shift from "ritual murder" to "blood libel" has been set. Chapter 1 offered several examples of ritual murder and its emphasis on reenactments of several

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid, 26-29.

<sup>268</sup> "...both opposition to pilgrimage and diversion of attention from bleeding hosts to eucharist can, of course, be understood as the assertion of ecclesiastical control, the imposition of elite clerical values on popular ones, the triumph of host (with its hidden God) over tangible, seeable holy matter." Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 31.

symbolic elements of the crucifixion. Crucifixion motifs never went away with the shift to what one can call “blood libel” but were eclipsed in influence by depictions of Jews as desirous to obtain blood for ritual or magical purposes.<sup>269</sup> The seminal case, of course, was that in Norwich in 1144, but the first wave of such cases seems to have been sparked off by a ritual murder case in Blois in 1177 surfacing to the west again in St. Edmund, England (1181).<sup>270</sup> Definitive evidence of the libel’s spread to Germany at about this time is lacking but charges against Jews for the murder of Christians for various reasons did circulate. The first verifiable charge of what can be called ritual murder in Germany was leveled at Fulda in 1235.<sup>271</sup> Ritual murder charges in England and France all but ceased after the 1255 case of Little Hugh of Lincoln in England.<sup>272</sup> A short succession of ritual murder cases ran through Germany in the 1280s followed into the first third of the fourteenth century by more interspersed host desecration and ritual murder charges.<sup>273</sup> This “wave” tentatively can be said to have ended with the host desecration cases associated with the Armledder bands in the city of Deggendorf in 1336.<sup>274</sup> It would be another century until persecutions again erupted in a contagious fashion. Between 1430 and 1431 cases of blood libel broke out in Constance, Lindau, Ravensburg, and Uberlingen in southern Germany culminating in the complete destruction of several Jewish communities.<sup>275</sup> From this point forward, this study will take cases in the last wave from approx. 1470 into consideration. This is

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<sup>269</sup> An accessible, expansive, but by no means exhaustive list of ritual murder and host desecration persecutions that can serve as a starting point to a line of inquiry examining these subtle differences can be found in “IV – Universal Dispersion” Mattis Kantor, *Codex Judaica Chronological Index of Jewish History*, 3rd print ed. (New York: Zichron Press Inc., 2007) 177-198.

<sup>270</sup> For cases in England and France see Gavin I Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 240-241.

<sup>271</sup> H.H. Ben-Sasson, “Changes in the Legal Status and Security of the Jews,” in *A History of the Jewish People*, 482. Also Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 268.

<sup>272</sup> For a discussion of cases in England see Colin Holmes, “The Ritual Murder Accusation in Britain,” in Alan Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, 1st ed. (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 99-102.

<sup>273</sup> Kantor, *Codex Judaica*, 197-202.

<sup>274</sup> For the Armledder movement see Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 54-57.

<sup>275</sup> Kantor, *Codex Judaica*, 207.

the time when the scales of symbolic emphasis shift from the crucifixion in favor of medical/magical blood.

The first case to be considered will be blood libel charges leveled in Endigen, Switzerland in 1470. Although the case of Simon of Trent in 1475 is far more famous and was even featured in Schendel's 1493 *Weltchronik*, it has already been comprehensively treated in a microhistory by R. Hsia.<sup>276</sup> R. Hsia also studied the Endigen case, in another work and offered his interpretations of the interrogation records and a brief description of the 1616 play based on the event.<sup>277</sup> But further treatment of the play itself is justified. A play provides a unique insight into popular belief on the blood libel as, unlike *exempla* written by and for the consumption/use of a clerical audience or interrogation records reflecting the beliefs of learned inquisitors, it was tailored to reflect the beliefs of a public audience. The play, *Das Endiger Judenspiel*, was first performed in 1616 and recounts the events of the alleged blood libel that took place in Endigen in 1462. While it is a century and a half removed from the original event, Hsia believes the play to likely be based on oral tradition. In any event, it provides a view of the blood libel discourse as it had consolidated in the century and a half under consideration.<sup>278</sup>

But before we get to the play itself, some background is merited. *Das Endiger Judenspiel*, recounts the alleged events of 1462 when Jews of the Swiss town of Endigen were said to have ritually murdered a travelling Christian family on Passover in order to acquire their blood. The initial stimulus for the charges was the 1470 discovery of "the remains of a man, a woman, and

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<sup>276</sup> R. Po-chia Hsia, *Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial*, Revised ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>277</sup> For an interpretation of the interrogation records and a brief summary of *Das Endiger Judenspiel* see Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 14-41.

<sup>278</sup> Blood libel beliefs certainly did not go away after the early 17<sup>th</sup> century but cases in Germany did. The blood libel found a home in Hungary and other nations of Eastern Europe. The trope itself was used by the Nazis well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. See Holmes, "The Ritual Murder Accusation in Britain," in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*, 99-134. Reprinted from *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4 (1981): 265-88. Also see n. 6, pp. 243 in Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*.

what looked like two small, headless corpses” in the collapsed charnel of Saint Peter’s Parish church. A Christian townsman came forward after the discovery and claimed he recalled a night when a local Jew took in a poor traveling Christian family a few years prior. The Christian children, he claimed, matched the description of the bones recovered from the debris. A Jew named Elias was then accused of having taken in the Christian family and murdering them with the help of his wife and brothers Eberlin and Mercklin. Elias and his brothers were eventually executed and the Jews of Endigen expelled.<sup>279</sup>

The play is notable in its almost singular focus on blood without allusion to the crucifixion. After a short introduction where a narrator informs the audience of the basic premise of the play, we are moved to a meeting of Jews who are planning the celebration of Lauberfest,<sup>280</sup> or the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. The holiday commemorates the forty years in which the children of Israel wandered the desert following their escape from Egypt. This choice of placement is telling of the move away from an emphasis on Jesus’s crucifixion as earlier manifestations of the Blood Libel took place either at Passover in order to coincide with Easter and mirror Jesus’s crucifixion or at Purim, a Jewish holiday Christians often believed to be a Jewish celebration of Christ’s murder and death. What was convenient about ritual murder charges and blood libel was their persistent malleability, allowing for substitutions of motivation and associated holidays dependent on Christian beliefs about Jews at each resurfacing. Purim commemorates the killing of Haman, a Persian who had planned the extermination of the Jews before his plot was revealed by Esther and he was put to death. The choice of Purim made sense to Christians as abuse of Haman for Christians not familiar with *Esther* could be seen as abuse of Christ. Christians, after all, did not have a festival in remembrance of Haman being put to justice. Without context

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<sup>279</sup> R. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 17.

<sup>280</sup> Literally, “Festival of Leaves”.

suggesting otherwise, it is no surprise that the ruckus abuse of a male effigy through the streets would be interpreted as a commemoration of a context with which Christian *were* familiar: the biblical abuse and mockery of Jesus Christ through the streets of Jerusalem that had culminated in his crucifixion, at the hands of the Jews.<sup>281</sup>

Vengeance is not absent from the *Judenspiel*. In fact, Act I opens with the Jew Elias, the ringleader of the murder, beseeching God for vengeance. In light of the celebration, he asks God to help the Jews to “take hold of the power of the Christians who hunt our people with the highest shamefulness, disgraceful vilification, [and] mistreat [us] throughout the whole world, in all [its] ends.”<sup>282</sup> But in short order the more dominant goal of obtaining Christian blood surfaces. He notes the special efficacy of Christian blood when he says that the Jews know it is particularly useful and good for many things. This is because Christians have special spirits (*sonderliche geister*).<sup>283</sup> Abraham follows to agree that it is good for the “Jewish practices” and that nothing better could be done than to cause Christian blood to be shed on the Earth as their parents and cousins had done in times before them.<sup>284</sup> These “Jewish practices,” though abstract, harken back to the creation of magical poisons or medical cures explored earlier. The play need not be more specific. The audience’s latent Jewish associations and stereotypes as magicians and abusers, developed over centuries, are more than capable of filling in the blank.

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<sup>281</sup> For more on the seminal article on the association between the ritual murder charge and Purim, see Cecil Roth, “The Feast of Purim and the Origins of the Blood Accusation,” *Speculum* 8, no. 4 (1933): 520–26. Also see Gavin Langmuir, “Thomas of Monmouth,” in Dundes, *The Blood Libel Legend*, 8–9. For a fourteenth-century example of the treatment of the effigy of Haman in the city of Provence see Theodor Herzl Gaster, *Purim And Hanukkah In Custom And Tradition - Feast Of Lots* (New York: Shuman, 1950), 66–67.

<sup>282</sup> “Den gwalt der christen stirtz zu handen, die unser volckh mit höchster schande durch echten, schandtlich schmehen, schenden in aller welt, an allen enden.” [Lines 147–150] Amira, *Das Endinger Judenspiel*, 23.

<sup>283</sup> “Nit unser acht vil unser got. Zue dem so ist der christen bluete zue vil sachen gar nutz und guet, wie dafs woll wissen gschwinde meister, die haben sonderliche geister.” [Lines 210–214] in *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>284</sup> “Der rath ist guet, auff jüdisch art gefast, gestalt zue diser fart. Nichts bessers khundt erfunden werden, dan christen bluete auff diser erden vergiessen, wie dan unser eltern dasselbig thon and ihre vettern.” [Lines 219–224] in *Ibid*, 26.

Six other Jews take part in the plot: Merckhlin, Menlin, Leoman, Schalatz, Marthia, and Hefs. Their statements in various ways all establish their hatred of Christians generally,<sup>285</sup> vow secrecy, and state that they will help with the deed when the opportunity arises.<sup>286</sup> Elias closes the scene with a summation of their plan: “Everything now depends on where I can find Christians that I can execute in accordance to an evil list. To strangle, kill, and murder [them]... [to] shed their blood, butcher, and behead them so to give birth to the...drops [of blood].” The motivations for the murder are clearly presented and they are not to crucify the children in order to mock Christianity, but rather as part of the process of acquiring not only blood but specifically Christian blood. David Biale has commented on how the idea of Jews requiring Christian blood “suggests a deep anxiety about Christian identity, since the theft of blood might be understood as theft of the very essence of the Christian by one who denies his religion.”<sup>287</sup> One recalls the earlier discussion over blood relics representing struggles for power. The Jew is the ultimate villain, at once denying the God who gives Christian blood its power, and what’s more, seeking to appropriate it in an ungodly fashion.

In these statements we can also peel back the symbolic associations to see why blood was such a powerful element of the Christian construct of the Libel. The depiction of blood as being birthed, for instance, is a significant factor in the minds of the audience in regard to its efficacy. Bynum in her seminal work on blood relics on Northern Europe pointed out that two Latin words, *sanguis* and *cruror* had been used in medieval references to blood and were typically understood by “Medieval theorists” to be “structurally opposite.” Isidore of Seville made this distinction by equating *sanguis/suavis* (sweet) and *cruror/corruptus* (corrupt). *Sanguis* further

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<sup>285</sup> Jew Schalatz “The Christians are my sworn enemies. Against them are my thoughts and spirit.” (*Der christen gschwornen feindt ich bin, wider sie steht mir mein denckh und sin.*) [Lines 367-8] in *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>286</sup> E.g. They are “Only missing an occasion.” (“Allein fehlt noch gelegenheit.”) [Line 331] in *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>287</sup> Biale, *Blood and Belief*, 2.

could be associated with inner living blood in opposition to spilled and coagulated blood.<sup>288</sup> As seen earlier with the miracle host at Wilsnack, this distinction was critical. We recall Heinrich Tocke's criticism that he "[saw] nothing red and [he had] never seen anything red," in order to discount the authenticity of the miraculous blood. Red, living blood was a potent substance but old, crusted, blood of a brown hue was useless.<sup>289</sup> That the Jews are "giving birth" to drops of blood serves as a symbolic signpost of the powerful life-force being stolen for use in clandestine ritual and magic.

Act II opens, like Act I, with praises to God but this time from the father of a Christian family. Being weary from travel, the family, a husband, wife, and two small children are overjoyed to have come across shelter. The husband Irus knocks on the door of Elias's home and his wife Sara answers. After Irus expresses his family's need, Sara tells him to go get his wife and children, offering bedding of straw and milk to ease their hunger.<sup>290</sup> This plot device is most likely included as a means to lure the family to their death. Jews "luring" Christians to their death is an old motif and part of the ritual murder tradition.<sup>291</sup> Quite speculative but still interesting to consider is the possibility that the offer of milk is to increase the medical/magical potency of the blood as food was thought to be the basis of blood's nutriment. It is hard to know for sure if that association would have instinctively been made by a popular audience. Elias is happy when he is informed of the situation and tells Sara that Jews will be coming from far away for the occasion.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 33.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>290</sup> [Lines 483-490] in Amira, *Das Endinger Judenspiel*, 36.

<sup>291</sup> In many versions of the story of the murder of Hugh of Lincoln, a young Jewish girl lures the boy inside a house to be killed. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 238.

<sup>292</sup> [Lines 525-530] in Amira, *Das Endiger Judenspiel*, 37.

When the other Jews arrive, the specifics of the act are outlined. It is clear that adult blood is undesirable, a reflection of the medical views we examined earlier. The parents are to be killed and only the blood of the young children collected. The children are to be murdered in their sleep, butchered and then their blood drained diligently.<sup>293</sup> The specific use to which the Jews will apply the blood is rather vague. The blood is supposed to be worn (*tragen*) and stored in a glass.<sup>294</sup> What the text means by worn is unclear. Several of the stereotypes outlined by Matteoni provide some avenues for interpretation. The first, is that the Jews are trying to “wear” blood in order to get rid of the *foetor Judaicus* or the smell Jews were thought to exude. The second would be as a topical treatment for skin diseases Christians believed Jews suffered. Another possibility is that Jewish “baptism in blood” is suggested. Recall Rupert of Deutz, the twelfth century monk discussed earlier and his commentary likening Moses’s sprinkling of blood on his people in Exodus with baptism.<sup>295</sup> Finally, it is also possible that the phrasing was left intentionally vague to leave the nefarious uses to the imaginations of the audience.

The play does not depict the actual murder itself but moves focus from the Jews’ fixation with blood to outline the criminal investigation and their defeat. The scenes following include neighbors’ discussions of suspicious noise they had heard the night before, a confrontation between Elias and his neighbor Jakob, an inept investigation by the village mayor, the collapse of the village charnel and the discovery of the victims’ bodies, and the Jews’ confessions and executions. It is a story ultimately depicting a Christian victory and one over villains so evidently corrupt as to seek to twist the precious symbol of Christian blood to their own use.

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<sup>293</sup> “Vor allen dingen solt ihr bhalten, dafs ihr hinfertigen die alten, die kinder erst in disem schlaff ermödet, metzget wie die scaf. Dafs blut derselben bhaltet flissig, die häupter auch gantz unverdrissig,” [Lines 591-596], *Ibid*, 39-40.

<sup>294</sup> “Wan nun difs alles ist geschehen und unser lust gebüsset sehen, der kinder bluot man tragen soll in einem glafs verwahret...” [Lines 607-610] in *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>295</sup> Biale, *Blood and Belief*, 86.



Many other individual case studies could be explored to support a shift in the ritual murder template during the period but, lacking an available meta-analysis, Catholic theologian Johann Eck's 1541 treatise on the blood libel, *Ains Juden Büechlins Verlegung* (Refutation of a Jewish Booklet), probably provides the best window into the state of the blood libel discourse in the early modern period.<sup>296</sup> The text, published in Ingolstadt, was written as a commissioned response to a dismissal of the blood libel by Lutheran minister Andreas Osiander, written and circulated contemporaneously. The main ground for Osiander's critique was the Jewish prohibition from the consumption of blood. Eck in just short of 200 pages of blackletter manuscript sought to refute Osiander primarily through biblical exegesis but also via frequent appeal to contemporary blood libel cases. One must remain cognizant of the fact that the text is the product of a single author who was hardly impartial, and that the text says as much about Eck's personal beliefs about the libel as the broader culture's. Still, its inclusion of detailed accounts of such a wide range of cases is exceptionally useful and opens a window through which to consider the dominant blood libel archetypes of the period. The source shows clearly that blood had become the central motif in the ritual murder charge, eclipsed crucifixion symbolism, and truly stood on its own as "blood" rather than merely "ritual murder" libel.

Before delving into the source itself, some basic background on its author should be understood. Johann Maier (Eck) was born in the small community of Eck (now Egg an der Günz) in southwest Bavaria, district Swabia, some 43 miles south of Augsburg in 1486. He attained his master's degree in 1501 at Tübingen, briefly studying Hebrew before leaving that same year due to an outbreak of the plague. He continued his studies in theology and law at

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<sup>296</sup> Johannes Eck, *Ains Juden Büechlins Verlegung: darin ain Christ/gantzer Christenhait zu schmach/will es geschehe den Juden unrecht in bezichtigung der Christen kinder mordt* (Ingolstadt: Alexander Weissenhorn, 1541). Online München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, <http://opacplus.bsb-muenchen.de/title/BV014816068>.

Freiburg and remained there as a teacher. In 1508 he joined the priesthood, receiving his doctorate in theology in 1510. In the same year, he was appointed theological chair at Ingolstadt and would eventually serve as prochancellor at the university starting in 1512. He both held this post and played a key role in the city's court of inquisition from 1523, until his death in 1543. Eck was a central and vocal critic of Protestantism in the early Reformation, engaging in back-and-forth polemics with Luther and other key figures. He was also a key player in public debates against Lutheranism as well as Zwinglism and a leading figure for the Catholic position at the Diet of Augsburg. Most important to the present study, however, is the fact that Eck was fundamental in the printing of Catholic works in the German language, so much so that he was entrusted by Pope Leo X with the publication of the bull *Exurge Domine* in Germany, Rome's official critique of forty-one of Luther's propositions.<sup>297</sup>

As a prolific polemicist, Eck, in the service of several of his patrons, primarily Bishop Christophe von Madruz of Trent to whom the polemic is addressed, took to refuting the near-heretical criticisms against the existence of the blood libel by Lutheran minister Andreas Osiander in his *Refutation* published in 1541.<sup>298</sup> A torrent of insults bears witness to broader Reformation tensions and Eck is quick to point out that Osiander's refutation of the blood libel is but part of a general evangelical trend of presenting falsehoods as truths in writings presented as learned.<sup>299</sup> Eck derides the sectarians of Germany for their insults and slander, pointing out that they are making unfair rebukes of noble secular and religious authorities with a frequency never before seen in the world.<sup>300</sup> It is a Protestant willingness to listen to such slander and falsehood

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<sup>297</sup> Philip Schaff, *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia Of Religious Knowledge*, vol. 4, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Lefferts A. Loetscher, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2016), 65-66, <http://archive.org/details/NewSchaffHerzogEncyclopediaOfReligiousKnowledgeVol.XReutschSon>.

<sup>298</sup> Eck, *Verlegung*, A66-i

<sup>299</sup> Eck, *Verlegung*, A68-i

<sup>300</sup> "So nun aber das schahen und laster gschrift. So gemein feind worde bey den Newen Evageli in teutschenland also vor nie von welt her das machen die zu horer" Ibid, A68-i.

dreamt up in the minds of unscrupulous ministers that is at fault for skepticism of the obviously factual blood libel. He criticizes the many people who like to listen to the Protestants whom he deems to be “fairytale tellers and profaners.”<sup>301</sup> Such people, he claims, make great liars (*lugner*) and are crazy (*verrucht*) and unsettled (*unruiwig*).<sup>302</sup> Though speculative, in light of our earlier insights into the role of anti-semitic charges in bolstering Catholic belief, it seems quite possible that Osiander’s denial of the libel was at least implicitly interpreted as a challenge to the tried and true evidence of transubstantiation provided by the existence of the blood libel.

A condemnation on the blood libel, a phenomenon known as clear factual occurrence by all proper Christians is unacceptable to Eck. It is a direct attack on all reasoning Christians who know quite well that the blood libel is based in observed fact. Osiander merely is unable to see or is willfully wicked due to his Protestant faith and association with the Jews.<sup>303</sup> While much of the text in *Das Verlegung*, then, is grounded in scriptural debate over whether the Old Testament supports a Jewish bloodlust, much of the source is a struggle over credibility: Lutheran or Roman Catholic. As such, Eck makes appeal to several alleged eye-witness account. These accounts also give us insight into what the blood libel archetype had evolved into by the early modern era. What becomes clear is that the narratives recounted are much different than the ritual murder charges of old, not only featuring blood as an accessory to crucifixion motifs but as a central symbol in its own right.

Eck’s impetus to write his refutation was directly the product of his eye witness to the trial of a blood libel case overseen by his superior, the Bishop of Ingolstadt. Eck relays in his introduction that he was in Eistet (Eichstätt) when a blood libel case was revealed.

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<sup>301</sup> “mälin trager un[d] schänder” Ibid, A68-i.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, A68-i.

<sup>303</sup> “Aber mit den juden vil und lang verwonet sein/macht liederlich Christen Dan bey guten wrid man gut und bey bosen wird man verkort spricht david” Ibid, A69-i.

Graceful man, this is how I have passed the previous years. I had been at Ingoldstadt and then was in Eistet where a wicked murder unfolded. There a four and a half year old named Michael, the son of George Pifenharten of Sappenfeld was abducted by Jews on a Sunday, fourteen days before Easter and was found on the Friday after Easter by the shepherds from Gern because of the digging of dogs. The child had been covered with many leaves.<sup>304</sup>

There is little reason to doubt that Eck is relaying information about the actual murder of a child, but there are subtle indications of an attempt to link the murder to expectations of when ritual murder should take place. Easter, after all, is one of the traditional holidays on which Jews were alleged to practice ritual murder. While the liturgical calendar was certainly a common means of keeping track of dating, the boy's disappearance and discovery did not line up neatly with Easter as he went missing long before the holiday and was discovered long after. In 1540, the year of Michael's disappearance, the Eve of Passover (14 Nisan) occurred on April 1st with the festival coming to an end on the ninth. Easter occurred on the seventh which places the discovery of Michael's body on the twelfth. The boy's disappearance, then, occurred over a week before Passover and nearly another before Easter. Even the discovery of the body occurred a full five days after Easter, quite a long time for God to wait before miraculously revealing the body as typical in host desecration and ritual murder narratives. The synchronicity is probably meaningless but leaves open the possibility that the inclusion of dating relational to Easter was done to set the case in a context fundamental to the blood libel tradition or, to divert blame to Jews.

Following this description of events, Johann writes that the body was taken to the Bishop of Eichstätt and examined. In addition to local authorities, a surgeon, barber, and the barber's apprentice were allowed to examine the body. Johann describes that "His whole body was miserably lacerated and one could see many stabs on it. In [the body] the flesh was cut out in

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<sup>304</sup> Eck, *Verlegung*, A66-i.

such a way that one should not see the stab [wounds].” Additionally, he says, “a small cross was carved on his right armpit (*achsel*) and the foreskin on his male member was cut off.”<sup>305</sup> Note the condition of the body. No wounds on the hands, feet, or sides are mentioned as in “ritual murder” cases. Instead, it seems, a cross-cut incision is suggested as used to drain an abscess or bodily fluids generally. This is not just mock crucifixion or ritual abuse but proper blood libel.

Due to the nature of the wounds, especially the circumcision, “attention was gathered and a great suspicion fell on the Jews who have done such child murder for other reasons [in the past]” and the Jews were brought to trial in Eichstätt where the Bishop exercised authority in the matter. Eck makes another allusion to the ritual murder textual tradition by noting that the hope of the trial was that “God would reveal the murder as has often been done [in the past].”<sup>306</sup> This serves the historical function of verifying Christian Truth and justice explored in the chapters prior. Like the body of Hugh of Lincoln, discarded and hidden in a cesspool, God would not allow Jewish villainy to go unpunished but provide divine justice.

Hopes of such swift justice were perturbed, when a “knight from Parsberg and protector of Sulzbach” came to the Jews’ defense, armed with Osiander’s writing. The knight suggested that the motives of the accusers were not pure but rather that economic animosity was at work, and quoted an old adage that “A rich Jew and a poor nobleman do not get along.”<sup>307</sup> This criticism was not the knight’s alone but echoed Osiander’s claim that Jews were being unjustly accused for the sole reason that some Christians wanted to grab hold of their goods.<sup>308</sup> Eck finds this claim of willful corruption on such a large scale abhorrent. He says that the book falsely

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<sup>305</sup> Eck, *Verlegung*, A66-i.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, 66-ii.

<sup>307</sup> “Ein reicher Jud / und armer Edelman/ feind nit gut bey ainander.” Ibid, A66-ii.

<sup>308</sup> “Dañ bringt ehr für/ain verdacht auff Christliche oberkait/die den juden gwalt unnd unrecht thünd/das Sie füg unnd schein suchen/allain ihr güter anzugreissen:” Eck, *Verlegung*, A69-i.

attributes tyranny to the secular authority and judges, kings, princes, men and citizens and vilifies everyone.<sup>309</sup> He claims that Osiander himself is trying to make the Jews look good by presenting a book of low skill and learning that is based not in fact but assumption.<sup>310</sup>

Eck's appeal to authority, like that of Thomas of Monmouth in the late twelfth century, is based on alleged insider information from baptized Jews. Use of such evidence has the potential to be problematic, as Eck in pages prior had brushed aside Osiander's argument that he knew personally that Jews did not commit ritual murder because he had been in close relationship with them for some time and was thus familiar with their rituals. If Eck's line of reasoning were to hold, how could a Jewish witness be trusted? Johann's solution is to point out that not all Jews are to blame nor in fact do most Jews even take part in ritual murder. He claims that only a few Jews are authorized to murder.<sup>311</sup> This potential problem resolved, the text sets forth examples from the late fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth centuries, to bear witness to the truth of the blood libel. These examples show charges befitting the blood-fixated culture they served.

As in the case of Michael Pifenharter, the character of wounds and crucifixion imagery no longer stand as central concern in the other examples in *Das Verlegung*. Eck decides to open with two examples of ritual murder that he claims one often hears about.<sup>312</sup> First, he mentions the case of one Maister Simon von Arcon. It is said that Maister Simon had killed and beheaded a child and that the head was carried throughout the streets by a dog. The authorities followed the trail of blood back to his home and found the body of a child. The profession of the accused, a medical doctor, provides cause to consider that Eck (or his source) was trying to suggest that the

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid, A67-i.

<sup>310</sup> "So doc her der oberkait und richtern/Künigen/fürsten/Herren und Burgern sollich tyranny fälschlich zu mist/und jederman Schmächt/ allain das er die Judē schön darunder mach" Ibid, A69-ii.

<sup>311</sup> "Darumb allain wenig warden zu dem mordt zugelassen." Ibid, A70-i.

<sup>312</sup> "Hat anzaigt von zwaiien gemarterten kindlein/das ain von horen Sagen:" Ibid, A70-i.

body was being used in order to acquire blood for medical purposes examined earlier. But because Eck's account of the case lacks additional details, this is not completely clear.

The case that follows gives much better insight into how the ritual murder trope had changed. The events in question occurred in 1452 and were relayed on the authority of Emanuel von Genua. Emanuel, claims Eck, is a Jew that was baptized into the Christian faith in 1456 and son of Salomonis von Genua, a doctor. The events according to Eck, took place at a secret meeting of eight Jews to which Emmanuel was eye-witness and either reluctant or forced participant. According to the story, the Jews gathered in the doctor's house and before doing the wicked deed took a strong oath that none of them would reveal what they were about to do but would rather suffer death or take their own lives. The ritual murder subsequently described melds old motifs with the new focus on blood. The scene starts familiarly: "A Jew had [the child] by the right arm, then another by the left, a third by the head. In addition, [the child was held] crosswise. The fourth had had a sharp, pointed, and long needle or chisel. [With it the Jew] opened up the stomach and stabbed the heart, quickly gathered [it] and again stabbed."<sup>313</sup> The image of the child being grabbed by both arms and handled "crosswise" no doubt recalls the crucifixion and the hasty stabbing of the heart rather than the diligent draining of blood as featured in versions like the *Judenspiel* is reminiscent of the ritual abuse found in host desecration narratives.<sup>314</sup> It is the next development, however, that highlights a perception of a Jewish lust for blood-as-substance: "There cleanly the blood flowed into a bowl until the child died and was thrown into a secret

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<sup>313</sup> "hats ain jud gehebt bey dem grechten arm/der ander bey dem lincken arm/der drit bey dē haupt/also creüz weyß: der viert hat scharpff spizig und lang nadel oder stichel gehabt: der hat das king bey dem bauch übersich gestochen dē herzen/schnel auszogen und wider gestochen:" Eck, *Verlegung*, A70-i.

<sup>314</sup> A broadsheet commemorating the host desecration libel of Passau depicts the Jews eager to abuse the Host: "[They] handled [the Host] with ferocious lust [in order] to crucify [it therefore] Proving Christian belief. A Jew placed the body of Christ on their altar in the synagogue, stabbed it, and from the opening blood flowed." A digital copy of the original broadsheet in German is available at "HOST, DESECRATION OF - JewishEncyclopedia.com," accessed December 5, 2016, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7906-host-desecration-of>.

chamber. And [they added] pears, apples, and other fruits [and] they dipped their snouts in and ate.”<sup>315</sup> Blood, according to anti-semitic stereotypes was needed by Jews as a cure of any number of maladies associated with their allegedly fundamentally weak constitutions. The Jews in the story, therefore, consumed the blood eagerly. Emmanuel, on the other hand, had an adverse reaction to consuming the blood of a Christian. Eck points out that the boy was put in such a state of disgust that he could not eat for two days following and felt as though his guts and innards wanted to fall out. Additionally, he adds, Emmanuel testified to this both before and after his conversion to Christianity, perhaps in order to emphasize that the convert did not share the same Jewish constitution and was predisposed for a Christian life. More simply, however, Eck could just be making an attempt to point out that the testimony came unadulterated by ecclesiastical coaching. But even though qualitatively blood seems to feature much more prominently in the story of Emmanuel than that of earlier ritual murder accounts, old themes also feature in Eck’s other examples.

Eck’s own eye-witness account of the blood libel charge leveled in Buchen in or around 1503, however, shows that by this point, a Jewish want or need for blood is able to stand alone as motivation for murder rather than a generalized attack on Christianity. He tells how a child went missing for quite a long time and was eventually found by a neighbor tending his oxen. When the child’s father was brought to Buchen to stand trial for unrelated charges of thievery, and his missing child was mentioned, he became visibly nervous and started to sweat. Eventually the father admitted that he was responsible for the death. He had sold the child to two Jews from

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<sup>315</sup> “das reilich heraus geflossen ist das blüt ins beck/bis das kind gestorben/unnd sie das geworffen in ain haymlich gmach: und biern/öpfel und von andern fruchten/habē sie schnüz getunckt ins blüt und gessen:” Eck, Verlegung, A71-ii.



Waldkirch, he claimed, because they promised that they would not kill him but only wanted to collect his blood. Something went wrong, however, and the child died.<sup>316</sup>

What is notable about this case is that the alleged motivation of the Jews is only to acquire blood, under the presumption that there would not be any other sort of abuse. Of course the father could have been making this claim merely to show lack of ill-intent and excuse his behavior, but even in that event, it holds that the father thought it a plausible defense that Jews would want a child for something other than just abuse. In early ritual murder cases, the infliction of mockery and suffering were fundamental. Blood could be collected but was not a driving motivation. Now the emphasis is reversed. The child may be abused in the process of Jewish blood acquisition but blood is central motivator and abuse a contingent albeit gruesome secondary factor. Additionally, Eck claims as his smoking gun the fact that he saw the body himself and even touched the wounds. Yet he does not note the location of the wounds or give any indication that they are analogous to Christ's or that the child was ritually circumcised. With virtually no evidence linking the mysterious Jews of Waldkirch to the crime nor the apprehension of alternative suspects, it seems Eck would not have hesitated to point out details about the nature of the wounds if contemporary conceptions of the libel depended on mock crucifixions. It is even less likely that he would ignore the point if relevant in a chapter with an argument so dependent on self-evident eye-witness evidence.

Eck, to be certain, wrote his treatise as support for a belief in the factual existence of Jewish *blood libel*, not *ritual murder libel*. The cases he mentions lack fixation on biblical parallelism and allusions made to link contemporary murders of Christian children with Christ's biblical death which Christians for millenia thought had been committed "at the hands of the Jews." It is

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<sup>316</sup> "wiewol sie im zügesagt/das kind wurd nit sterben/allain wolten sie von im das blüt fahē: das laider anders gerated/unnd das kind daran gestorben:" Eck, Verlegung, A72-ii.

not an emphasis on New Testament parallels, in fact, that Eck uses to prove Jewish but instead arguments from the Old Testament that seek to twist actual Jewish scripture to demonstrate their fundamental obsession with blood. For instance, Eck uses Exodus 24 to point out that the old covenant was established when Moses sprinkled blood on his people. This created a covenant in and desire for blood, and Jews have since tried to satisfy this blood lust by killing Christian children.<sup>317</sup> That is but one example of the basic arguments filling the work's loathsome pages. But while the Old Testament arguments are interesting, it is as an anthology of blood libel cases that the work most clearly demonstrates that blood had by the mid-sixteenth century in German-speaking areas become the *primary* motivation for alleged Jewish ritual murder supporting libels.

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<sup>317</sup> “Moyses hatt das blüt genommen/uñ das volck darmit besprengt; uñ Sprach. Das ist das blüt des bunds/den Gott mit euch troffen hat uber all disered. Aus disem allem ist unüberwintlich erhalten wider der juden fürsprecher: das die juden nit ain sollich abscheühen haben ab dem blüt/oz Sie darumb underlassen der Christen kinder zuerwürgen.” Eck, *Verlegung*, A81-i.

## Conclusion

In the indices of almost any work on ritual murder libel, one finds the words “see *blood libel*.” Others use only one of the terms. This conflation is understandable. The libels, after all, are part of a seamless, if meandering chain of transmission and share many of the same motifs in varying proportion. Arguing for a distinction between earlier “ritual murder” charges and late “blood libel” charges is not easy, especially as most scholars to this point either have not found the distinction significant or have been focused not on the *form* of the libels but rather the root causes of individual cases alone. To notice the distinction requires more than a casual look at the usual examples. More often than not, if one seeks out blood libel imagery, Michel Wolgemut’s famous woodcut from Schendel’s *Weltchronik* which illustrates the alleged ritual 1475 murder of Simon of Trent will be the first image found.<sup>318</sup> The image depicts the boy with arms held out crosswise in a dramatic reenactment of the crucifixion as well as a Jew draining blood into a bowl out of a wound in the boy’s side mirroring the wound inflicted to Jesus’s side in John 19:34. Crucifixion imagery in the woodcut is melded in equal measure with a visual depiction of Jews eager for blood. If one were to work from this image alone and then explore a random sample of ritual murder or blood libel cases, it would appear that no distinction between “ritual murder” and “blood libel” exists as most cases included some form of mock crucifixion and at minimum a vague allusion to the Jewish desire for the blood of Christian children. The

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<sup>318</sup> The image can be freely viewed online. “File:Schedel Judenfeindlichkeit.jpg - Wikimedia Commons,” accessed December 12, 2016, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schedel\\_judenfeindlichkeit.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schedel_judenfeindlichkeit.jpg).

distinction only become clear when one pays careful attention to *emphasis* and the alleged *primary motivation* Jews had in killing Christian children. Prepared in such a way, it becomes clear that the proportional emphasis on mock crucifixion or blood lust shifted over time until in Germanic Europe, a libel had developed from disparate influences in which the alleged Jewish desire for Christian blood alone could support the accusation.

The failure of others to notice the distinction is more than understandable. If ritual murder libel generally featured crucifixion motifs alone without blood imagery and likewise the blood libel only included a draining of Christian children for alleged Jewish ritual without any crucifixion symbolism, the conflation of the libels could not happen. Even so, one wonders why a distinction was noticed enough in the first place to create the second term. So where did the distinction come from in the first place and why was it ignored? The first indication of a difference between the “standard” ritual murder charge and the blood libel came from the first such libel to surface in Germany at Fulda in 1235 and it is starting with this case that previous scholars identified *some* distinction between this and earlier charges. Langmuir, for example, considered the Fulda case as the creation of a “second type of ritual murder accusation” that appeared “by itself or in conjunction with the older accusation.”<sup>319</sup>

On the surface, it would appear that Langmuir was cognizant of the distinction this study has labored to argue, but was not in fact arguing the same thing. By “on its own,” Langmuir was referring to the ambiguity of the Fulda case and making a large leap with the available evidence. He says that “When Frederick II in 1236 denied the truth of the blood accusation raised at Fulda, no question of crucifixion was involved.”<sup>320</sup> He goes on to argue that Henry III sent two Jewish converts to investigate the validity of the charge and that “Henry remarked that he had never

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<sup>319</sup> Langmuir, “The Knight’s Tale of Young Hugh of Lincoln,” 462.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid, 479.

heard of an accusation like that at Fulda.”<sup>321</sup> As the ritual murder charge was well known in England by that time, Langmuir concluded that the charge at Fulda must have lacked familiar crucifixion elements. While this evidence alone does not prove that the Fulda case did not include crucifixion motifs, as the confession of the accused Jews found in the Marbach Annals only includes the attainment of blood for its curative properties as motive for the crime, his basic argument has a basis on which to stand.<sup>322</sup>

Still, the fact that Langmuir made a distinction concerning the Fulda case does not belie what has been achieved by the present study. For even if the Fulda case *was* made without any reference to crucifixion, its successors were not. The next famous case of ritual murder accusation that occurred in Valreas in 1247 for example occurred the “Tuesday in Passion week” and the Jews were accused to the child being discovered with “wound on her forehead, hands, and feet.” And it is noteworthy here that the Jews in that case *were* accused of extracting blood from the girl but that this blood was meant not to serve as a cure to alleged Jewish maladies but as a sacrifice.<sup>323</sup> Moreover, Herman Strack was correct when he pointed out as early as 1909 that early sources that argue that Jews want Christian blood, are speaking metaphorically, that is to say, the Jews want Christian lives as *retribution*, not the blood itself for “its utilisation for ritual objects.”<sup>324</sup> It holds that apart from Fulda and perhaps other very rare cases of which this author is unaware, it was not until around the beginning of the early modern period in Germanic Europe, that the blood libel came to stand independently of the ritual murder accusation.

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid, 479.

<sup>322</sup> Hermann Leberecht Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice: Human Blood and Jewish Ritual, an Historical and Sociological Inquiry* (London: Cope & Fenwick, 1909), 179.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, 178.

The previous chapters of this work have endeavored to demonstrate how and why the ritual murder libel evolved into an independent blood libel. To accomplish this end, it was necessary to show both the social function that the libels served for medieval Christian society but also how the religious and intellectual inclinations of these societies shaped *forms* of accusation. Chapter 1's broad temporal focus allowed for the application of René Girard's scapegoat model in order to see that at the heart of anti-Semitic accusations stood Christian anxiety over proper cosmic order. Challenges to this order did not merely come in the form of physical threats such as military challenges or instances of plague but also could come in the form of psychological challenges in integrating new Church dogma. In this way, the dominant religious concerns of an era were expressed in the dominant motifs employed in anti-Semitic libels, initially and specifically the ritual murder libel featuring crucifixion motifs. Chapter 2 took a closer look at how specific challenges to religious dogma in the form of Jewish anti-Christian polemics might have played a role the creation of increasingly negative anti-Semitic caricatures and the forging of symbolic associations between Jews, the Eucharist, and child harm. These associations were the foundation of the developments explored in Chapter 3 as a German focus on the Eucharist and miraculous blood generally shifted emphasis in the libels and defined the acquisition of blood as the Jews' alleged primary motivation rather than the abuse of Christians generally. With the case of William of Norwich, we see the beginning of the creation of an archetype that influenced accusations across Europe over centuries. Thomas of Monmouth's initial hagiographic work drew parallels between William, Christ, and Christ's crucifixion. The initial motivation was to insult and abuse Christ and Christians through the reenactment of the crucifixion. By the sixteenth century, however, we see from Eck's formation of the blood libel that a new version of the charge stands very distinct from those prior. It has been the goal of this

work to bridge the gap between the two and provide sufficient context to make sense of the transition. While the approach taken has been broad by necessity, with the distinction more firmly in place, it is my hope that additional scholarship will not only shed light on the subtle but relevant differences in individual cases but also continue to take heed of overarching trends.

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